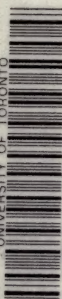


THE HOLY TREE

GERALD O'DONOVAN

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



3 1761 00672403 3

THE HOLY TREE

RECENT FICTION

THE CLASH *By Storm Jameson*

BRUSHWOOD *By Kathleen M. Burrow*

MOUNTAIN BLOOD *By Joseph Hergesheimer*

THE GREAT QUEST *By C. Boardman Hawes*

A LOVE CONFERENCE *By Mrs. Arthur Harter*

THE SECRET HARVEST *By Dorothy Percival*

CAREER *By Dorothy Kennard*

JADE AND OTHER STONES *By Hugh Wiley*

LONDON : WILLIAM HEINEMANN

0.262h

THE HOLY TREE

By

GERALD O'DONOVAN

Author of "Father Ralph," etc.



176308.

27. 11. 22



LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN



Made in Great Britain

PR
6029
D54H6

CONTENTS

PART ONE

	PAGE
PRÉLUDE	9

PART TWO

THE HOLY TREE	70
-------------------------	----

PART THREE

THE BITTER GLASS	166
----------------------------	-----

PART I—PRELUDE

FIRST CHAPTER

“WHAT in the name of heaven is making them all so cantankerous, and it Mayday and all?”

Ann Logan laughed the question at the row of lustre jugs hanging from the top shelf of the dresser, a slight twist in her smile, doubt in her soft voice.

“Going out into the rain in your new cotton? Every penny of thruppence three-farthings a yard within at Brannigans. Take it off you, I tell you, and put on your linsey.”

Mrs. Logan spoke in anger to the pot of Indian meal stirabout hissing on the open hearth.

“Let the girl be, woman. What’s in a drop of rain? And it clearing too. At the worst, can’t you give her the loan of your hood cloak?”

Old Pat Logan spoke in a quiet voice to the sea, bellowing beyond the poplar trees at the end of the bawn.

The sinking feeling that oppressed Ann passed away. Her grandfather might look stern, but he was a true friend in trouble. When the jugs failed her he’d see the bright side to things. The jugs needed the sun to make them laugh back at her; but he had some sort of a sun inside him, that you could feel even when it didn’t show on his face.

She had set her heart on going to eight o’clock mass, to deck the Mother of God, and it the Holy Month of May, with the finest flowers in the whole parish. ’Twas a pity about the rain, but

she had her eye all along on the hood cloak. Underneath it she could carry her hat and the posy. And Jamesy Curtin 'd keep the cloak for her in the chapel porch during the mass, so that she could show off the dress and the new hat.

The depressed feeling came back. What would her mother say at all when she saw the new hat? She'd be mad, even though it was Uncle Maurice paid for it out of his own pocket. Anyone 'd know there was vexation in the way her mother stirred the pot, just as if she had a grudge agin it. And there was Tom looking out of the window, with a face on him as hard as the hob of hell, and he scarcely a man yet. Two-and-eleven the hat cost, and Tom and her mother would throw it at her for a month of Sundays; recounting the number of hooks it'd buy for the long lines, and the stones of Indian meal the pigs lost by it.

"A whole half-crown for the stuff! Not to speak of the trimmings; and two shillings to Johanna Duffy for making it," Mrs. Logan moaned. "And it all to be spoilt in the rain. It's the headless house we have about us, Tom agra."

She scraped the pot-stick, lifted the pot off the fire and poured the stirabout into a keeler.

"Me new cloak, is it?" she muttered as she worked, "that I brought into the house twenty-three year ago last Shrove? And it as new to-day as the day my own mother bought it. Not a penny of Logan money in it. If your grandfather had his way it's bare and naked we'd be, Tom asthore. Logan money indeed! All the Logans ever had was the money they owed. If it wasn't by the grace of God you turned out to be a Finnegan, it's in the poorhouse we'd be this day."

Ann's knees trembled. She leant for support against the dresser. If only the sun would shine and dance on the coloured jugs. Or her Uncle Maurice come down from the loft. She listened to the heavy footsteps on the creaking boards overhead. He was getting up, but would he be down in time? Her mother was too quiet to be wholesome, with that fire in her eyes. Once she got right into the history of the Logans nothing would hold her. And there was Tom hitching up his breeches to say something that'd put more fat on the fire.

"It's in the poorhouse we'll be anyway with the weather that's in it. Not a tail of a fish these three days. The spuds rotting in the ground, and Luke Finnegan's note coming due besides."

Ann held her breath. Luke Finnegan's promissory note always sent her mother into a tantrum. With it she flayed many a generation of the Logans, her dead husband the worst of a bad lot, since he had the wickedness to lose the boat when he was drowned. Tom never before tried to rouse their mother agin their father! He knowing right well it was the surest thing to make their grandfather lose his temper. And if he lost it now there was an end to eight o'clock mass. The flowers she had kept sheltered from the rain, for the last three days, 'd never go into the big vase Jamesy Curtin was keeping empty for her in front of the Virgin's statue. Betsy Dunne 'd likely get it, and it the only one worth having on the whole altar.

She shut her eyes in despair, wished she was never born, was dead, had run off alone in the rain to mass, no matter what happened to her new dress. . . . had even put on her linsey.

Though that 'd be worse than being dead. And Betsy Dunne having a new dress, she'd be sure to be in! Only it had spots and not flowers. The sort of dress that 'd be something by itself, but nothing at all alongside her own. Would her mother never speak?

Wasn't she the mean girl to be thinking of grigging Betsy Dunne, when she ought to be readying herself to defend her father, and he dead and all? If she only had the courage, for once, to stand up to her mother! What were the Finnigans, with their public-house and their sidecar, and they without a song or a step of dance among the lot of them! And the Logans were like a story you'd read of in an old book! If the sea took them itself, it wasn't before they left a name the parish would never forget; and neighbouring parishes too. Within in Lismeedy, and over in Ballyclough, they had a song about her great-grandfather, Jack Logan. And her father was no less of a hero at a pattern or a threshing or a hurley match. But all her mother could remember about them was that they lost their boats when they were drowned!

“ Ah.”

Ann shuddered. But no other sound came from her mother. It wasn't like her to wait so long, and the “ Ah ” was soft like. Was she saving up for a regular broadside? If only the old clock wouldn't make that scratchy tick that made her blood run cold.

She opened an eye. Her mother was stooping over the keeler, feeling the heat of the stirabout with her fingers. She wasn't looking cross. Tom was staring, quiet like, at the rain beating against the

window-panes. Her grandfather was gazing, as if he was dreaming, at the white breakers. The waves looked as if they were rushing in at the house; but it was how the wall at the end of the bawn hid the stripe of land and the sandy beach between the sea and the house. Thank God, no one was looking cross; not even the waves, and they running back and forth like half-mad colts. And it was clearing, no matter for the rain. The battered face of the clock was pleasanter; and there was a shine on the jugs that was next door to a smile.

“Is it a Finnegan press you?” Mrs. Logan said to the clock. “In another couple of minutes the blessed food ’ll be cool enough for the pigs. Luke above all! Though he’s not one of the family so to speak, not within the degrees of kindred, anyway, sure he has the name. Whoever heard of a Finnegan that wasn’t generous? I wouldn’t be at all surprised, Tom, if your grandfather wasn’t right. The weather is going to clear.”

“He’s a warm man. . . . I don’t know though,” Tom said, with a cautious look at Ann. “Anyway, there’s no time to talk now. It’s twenty past seven, and ’twill take them all their time to get to the chapel. Uncle Maurice! Uncle Maurice! Be hurrying down. My grandfather and Ann is off.”

“Warm?” Mrs. Logan said with an indignant flush. “How many boats’ shares has he between here and Ballyclough? And I.O.U.’s, and God knows what and how much? And the man is more than willing, I tell you. The heart is bursting out of him with the eagerness.”

Pat Logan swung round on the heel of a well-

blackened brogue, his florid face blazing with anger. His bushy, white eyebrows bristled. He clutched his thick blackthorn and shouted :

“ Whist, woman. Not a word of that, I tell you. Have you any feeling at all in you ? ”

“ On a bright May morning long ago, when first you were my bride,” came in a rough baritone down the opening from the loft.

Ann gave a sigh of relief. Uncle Maurice 'd quieten them. And she not knowing what to make of them at all !

Leaning against the dresser she had watched her mother grow into good humour, and her grandfather lose his temper over nothing. Or over that old scarecrow Luke Finnegan, who was less than nothing. What was it all about ? A queer pride the Finnegans had in money, when her mother 'd claim relationship with Foxy Luke !

With a grim smile Mrs. Logan watched the heavily built man descend the ladder from the loft. Half-way down he stopped and looked at the group in the kitchen. A thick brown beard and moustache, streaked with grey, hid his lips, but his eyes twinkled.

“ What's all the row about ? At it again, Julia ? And you, father, and you going to the altar rail and all ! Fie, fie ! ”

“ True for you, Maurice. True for you. But . . . ”

The old man tightened his lips over toothless jaws and glared at his daughter-in-law.

She shrugged her shoulders. “ Leave me and my affairs alone, Pat Logan. Take your son's advice and keep fit for the altar. As for him . . . Even the Old Boy can talk sense at times, they

say," she added, with a malevolent glance at her brother-in-law.

Maurice laughed noiselessly into his beard :

" And I getting up out of my warm bed and all to go to mass ! A blessed saint couldn't do more. Give the sailorman a chance, Julia."

" Light talk and nonsense. . . . There's every Logan for you. But, with the help of God, I'll lead and guide my own childre, and keep the evil strain out of them. I've strove night and noon to put sense into them, and God'll give me my reward. Thank the Lord, I put down their Logan romancing early. Help me with the keeler, Tom. The food is getting cold on the pigs."

Maurice pulled at his beard as he came down the ladder, whistling a bar of "Comin' through the Rye." At the foot he broke off the tune and said with a grin :

" 'Tis you were always the romantic woman, Julia."

Mrs. Logan bridled :

" Far be it from me to bandy words with a Logan. Before night you'll see what you'll see. Ann, put my hood cloak on you, and keep your dress spick and span. Let ye all be off to mass now and pray for the grace of God."

Even the unexpected offer of the hood cloak did not make Ann move. What did they mean ? It was all on the head of herself she knew from her grandfather's uneasy looks at her. But, thank God, her mother had never put any of the sense of the Finnegans into her. Maybe, her grandfather was going to let it all out ?

She watched him move across from the shut half-door to the foot of the ladder, where her

mother and Tom stood holding the keeler between them. He took off his high felt hat, held out his arms towards her mother and said in a broken voice :

“ I pray you, Julia, not to do the like of that of a crime ? ”

Mrs. Logan looked at him with a set face. Slowly a smile altered the hard line of her lips. She moved towards the half-door, but turned as Tom opened it.

“ It’s a happy day for me when I brought a Logan to beg of me at the long last,” she jeered, and then stalked out into the rain.

Ann ran to her grandfather and kissed him.

Maurice’s beard shook with laughter.

“ For shame, Uncle Maurice,” she said indignantly, tears in her eyes. “ One ’d think it was at a play you were.”

“ And isn’t it ? ” he grinned. “ Be sure to bring your hat under your cloak. It’ll be fine before we get to the chapel.”

SECOND CHAPTER

ANN caught up with her uncle and grandfather at the gate of the bawn. She was still excited by the scene in the kitchen, and took only a half-hearted interest in the hat she held under her cloak. If the talk had been about anyone else but Luke Finnegan she'd say they were thinking of marrying her off. . . . Little tremors shot through her, and found expression in a warm blush. Not even her mother would think of him for her, and he every day of sixty, with a wife dead on him these five years. But if it was someone else now ?

She stood and listened to the men discussing the caulking of the boat which lay, bottom up, beside the gate. Her grandfather had been flurried enough in the kitchen, but he was as cool as ever again. Uncle Maurice was never excited about anything. How could he, and he roaming the world far and wide for near thirty year ? That was life.

She clutched the cloak tightly in front. Delicious warm waves passed through her. She turned her face to the rain to try and continue the sensation. Kings and queens he had seen, and things people wrote books about. He had been all over the ground them old Greeks, that her grandfather told tales of, used to live in. No doubt he had come across many a hero of a story-book and a poem,

and he once within a few handthrows of the Pole itself.

If she was only a man now, or in the way of meeting heroes of the kind! It was seldom the like of them ever came to Clasheen. Or men like her father, even, or like Jack Logan, the hurler. Not but she'd rather a man that made songs than any other sort; more than Emmett or Wolfe Tone or Parnell himself. . . . Men that lifted you off your feet with a score or less of words, till it was in heaven you found yourself walking. Walking was too mean a name for the feeling you had. . . . Your head amongst stars, the clouds holding up your feet, all the sweet scents of the world blowing in your face, and music inside you like nothing else on earth.

Not but there were many things on the earth too that made you feel wonderful: the song of a lark, and you lying on your back in the meadow; the sun rising over Knockbrack, and you digging bait on the mud flat near the mouth of the river of a summer morning; rocking in the boat of a night, and it hanging by the nets under the light of the stars, the sea like a glass in which you could see all the beauty that ever was . . . hundreds and hundreds of things. The world was all beautiful, and to be alive was enough. . . . Things too that she didn't know yet. . . . Love, that the poets were always singing about.

She drew a long breath. Her brown eyes dilated. Her breasts shook, and she saw the rain a silver mist. What must love be like if the thought of it was like this? . . . giving you the feeling of standing on Knockbrack of a summer evening, the heather all in bloom around you, the

scent of it fair taking your breath away ; the river laughing at your feet in the long shadows of the trees, and hurrying towards the sea in a swirl of white and gold by Knockeen Point, a lark or a curlew, maybe, giving edge to your feeling ; every-sight and sound flooding your heart till you were hushed into a great quiet, and you felt at one with everything. . . . As if yourself and the rock underneath your feet and the golden haze about you and the cool shadows and the sea were all of a piece : one with the great silence, wrapped round in all the colours of the rainbow . . . waiting for something to happen. It was always like that. . . . You were always waiting for something more wonderful.

“Come along, Ann. The first Gospel ’ll be long over before we’re at the chapel gate.”

It took her a few seconds to understand her grandfather’s half querulous words. She hugged the cloak to her breast and laughed.

“Is it Father John to think of beginning of a wet morning before half-past eight—more likely it’s nine it’ll be.”

Maurice groaned : “What a fool I was not to have my breakfast.”

“Tush, tush, Maurice. The mass ’ll do you more good fasting,” the old man said, as he picked his steps through the mud of the narrow lane. “I suppose now it’s often enough you found it hard to get mass on them long voyages ?”

“Often enough,” Maurice said, smiling over his shoulder at Ann.

’Twas hard to know what Uncle Maurice meant with them solemn laughing eyes of his. He didn’t seem to be waiting for anything. Like as if he

had gathered all the knowledge of the world, and it was half a joke to him. He gave no sign of ever having been racked by love, like them poets. And if he was, it sat light on him. Not like her grandfather, left sadlike. Or, maybe, it had passed Maurice by? But that was unlikely with the power he knew about it.

They walked in single file along the high narrow path of uncut peat, across the cutaway bog, the wind swishing the rain athwart them.

How they all three took it was just like them, she thought, with a smile. It wasn't broken at all by love her grandfather was; though he bent away from the rain as if, at any minute, it might sweep him down into the bog. Like one of them trees bent sideways by many a winter wind he was, firm as a rock for all that. He had learned to bear things without being broken, just by bending under them. Anyhow, every step he took was sure. Maurice walked as if there was no rain or wind at all in it, as straight as a rush. Whilst herself was leaning against the weather for fear it'd push her over.

Why was she thinking this foolishness, and it all clear in the weather quarter, and the sun shining over Ballyclough? The wind was dropping already, and the rain was only a drizzle. In a minute the sun 'd be all over them. Love was nothing to be afeard of. It was more like a May day after rain, gay with laughing, all the colour and scent of heaven in it. . . . There was the sun at last! And the clouds, as if they were shamed of themselves, flying off towards Lismeedy. Even the bog pools were wonderful, waking up out of their sleep and shouting at the flowers to open

themselves. You could feel the heavy scent of them already; and they blinking and shaking off the wet under the smile of the blessed sun.

She put back the hood of her cloak and drew in a long breath.

“My, I’m hot,” she laughed.

Her uncle and grandfather stopped, turned round, and looked at her.

“Hats be damned!” Maurice said with an approving smile, chucking her under the chin. “I never want to see you in anything else but that cloak, Ann.”

Pat Logan nodded:

“There’s nothing like the cloak when you’re as slim as a young birch.”

“Nonsense, father. It’s more like a beech she is, straight and clean, with the sun in the leaves.”

“It’s more like a farze bush afire I feel this minute, with all the heat there is in me. Take it off me, Uncle Maurice. With the posy and the hat I haven’t a hand on me to spare.”

Maurice loosed the cloak, took it and the flowers.

“Not a curl gone out of you, with all the rain and all,” her grandfather said, resting on his stick.

She shook out her hair. “It’s to spoil me ye would if I paid any heed to ye. Maybe it’s Diana I am, or another of them undecent, pagan goddesses?”

“It’s few of them had that brown hair with the light in it, and them eyes,” her grandfather said gravely.

“Shame on you, grandfather, and you going to the altar! Leave the flattery to my Uncle Maurice. He’s more used to it.”

Maurice laughed :

“ If I hadn't seen you in the cloak, I wouldn't believe you could look better than in the hat.”

Her grandfather struck the head off a buttercup, growled “ Damn them and their Luke Finnegan,” and strode away.

She paused in pinning on her hat.

“ Is the old miser rising the interest, and my grandfather so put out with him to-day ? ”

Maurice's beard shook, and his eyes danced.

“ That's it, the damned old fox. Gold he wants for his few dirty ha'pence. But we'll put the kybosh on him. Sink his eyes.”

They were all taking sudden turns to-day, she thought, as she finished pinning her hat. There was Maurice off, as if he was in a hurry for mass. And it all one to him whether he was in for the last Gospel or the first, or snug in his bed if it went to that. A frown on him too. . . . If there was only a pool near enough to see how her hat sat on her.

Not that anyone had such an uncle and grandfather. What blinded her mother to them, at all, at all ? . . . It wouldn't matter to get your shoes muddy, and you in a cloak ; but in a bright dress and a hat 'twas different. She must go slow and catch up with them when they got to the dry road on the rise. . . .

Maurice had been coming in and out of her life, now and then, ever since she was in the cradle, with a paper bag of sweets, or a silk ribbon, or a book, or a dress length and such stories as never were. Often, every couple of months or so ; and then, maybe, not for a year or more. And it wasn't the fairing he always brought her she

looked forward to, so much as to himself. It wasn't "a Finnegan never did that," with him, or "what'll the neighbours say?" when she asked his advice, or a thing came under his notice; but, straight out, how it looked to himself; or else to throw it back on herself to decide. He made her feel grown up, and she only nine or ten.

The two years he gave her at the Convent Day School at Lismeady, after she had finished the sixth book at Clasheen, she'd never forget to him. It was the learning he had to start with, and he intended for a priest, that lit up all his travels; and he going as far as Maynooth, and not baulking till the Tonsure. With the knowledge he picked up after, from every corner of the world, and he a sailor, it's the wise way he had of looking at things.

Her grandfather had great learning in him too, that he got from the hedge schoolmaster that used to lodge in the house, and he young. But with him it ran more into ancient heroes and gods and goddesses and love stories and old songs. Though he never moved a foot beyond Lismeady, he could tell many a thing to Maurice about all them foreign places. . . .

She was the lucky girl to be brought up with them both; men that even Father John Moriarty had a great respect for. Though you could see he was on his P's and Q's before Maurice, like as if he was a bit afeared of him. No doubt it was because Maurice made light of his duties; while rain, hail or snow never kept her grandfather from eight o'clock mass of a Sunday. Maybe the priest had less fear of her grandfather because he was as simple as a child; while Maurice was always saying

things with that funny laugh of his, not easy to understand . . . that 'd only dawn on you afterwards, if at all.

She laughed as she crossed the stile giving on the Brinney road, and saw the two men ahead, Maurice about fifty yards behind his father. They were like that when anything bothered them, thinking things out for themselves, though they were ready enough to listen to other people's troubles. . . .

A hard life she had, but they always lightened it . . . mending nets till her back was near broke, or digging bait at the dawn at the mouth of the river when the tide was off the flat, or weeding, or the like. Even the years she trudged into Lis-meedy to school, there was work, from the first light, before she started ; and, after she came back, till late in the night. She could never have stood all that, and her mother's tongue besides, only for her grandfather.

It was hard to blame her mother and all the misfortunes that had come on them. It was like as if the sea had a spite agin them. When it failed to take themselves with all the other Logans, it took a whole train of their nets, or their lobster pots or long lines or stove in their boat.

Often she herself sat in terror on the strand looking at it, her blood running to water at the roll of the ground swell. And when she heard it growling in the night, and she in her bed, she had shivering fits. Yet, with all that, she couldn't help loving it. To swim out agin the waves of a morning, or to sail the boat in a strong wind, with the end of the mainsheet in one hand and the steer in the other, was to feel alive. The sea left

her for weeks on end with nothing to eat but a salt herring and potatoes; and, often, not even that; but still it gave a delight to her heart that nothing else could give. Like the love them poets sang, though it might take everything from her itself, it gave her everything. She could stand all the pain of it for one minute of the bliss. Often and often of an evening, whilst she watched the gold track the sun made on the sea, didn't she think she saw the great lover that was to come to her, sailing down it in a golden boat. . . . What gave her dreams like that was a thing to love!

There she was, maundering away, and her grandfather already at the Cross. Anyway, the last bell hadn't gone, so he wouldn't be put out by being late. Though it must be half-past, if it was a minute. And the congregation was all gathered, and Maurice was getting fidgety under the posy.

"Hurry up, and take this. There's half a dozen young fellows 'll be glad to carry it in for you, if you have the mind."

"Cock 'em up indeed. For a pin I'd make you carry it in yourself."

"Here's Joe Dunne coming. Them tricks wouldn't be wasted on him, by all appearance."

"For God's sake save me, Uncle Maurice. Pigs and fish is his only love talk, and I've more than enough of both."

"Has he asked you yet?"

"I have to fend him off it. Not but he nearly always pulls himself up on the brink when he remembers I have no fortune."

"But you could get him to?"

"Oh, easy. Has he gone by yet?"

"He's still hanging round, staring at you. A

fine upstanding decent man he is," Maurice added, after a moody silence.

"So is an owl a fine, upstanding, decent bird. But you wouldn't like to live your life with him. Could I whip past him if I ran?"

"You could then. But don't you run into Luke Finnegan, and he in your path."

"Yerra, what does the like of him matter? One, two, three."

She made a bee-line for the chapel door. What were they all harping on Foxy Luke for, and he not there at all? The whole world knowing that he always came to second mass. There was Joe Dunne hurrying, but she'd easy cut him out. Bad cess to him if he wasn't too quick for her.

"What are you running for, and the last bell not gone? It's fine you're looking to-day, Ann."

"There's them that think I'm passable at all times, Joe Dunne. Don't you be in the way of my offering to the Mother of God."

"As if it wasn't to St. Joseph you were going to give them! It's easy known for what."

She hesitated, stood for a moment, and looked back at him. . . . He was improving surely. And there was little doubt he was a fine figure of a man.

"It's to the Virgin I have to pray to ward them off me, and not to any St. Joseph to find me one."

There was a lead for him. But it's sure he'd be to baulk. She added a look, which, even in the shadow of the brim of her hat, was, she felt, a trifle more encouraging than she intended. . . . He felt it right enough, with that pink blush all over him.

"You know, Ann——"

There was the same old struggle on his face again, between her and her empty pocket. It was a pity there was that hard strain in him. Still, she could break that down in him, for the time at least. But it was terribly lasting! Didn't she know it in her mother and Tom?

If it wasn't a wrong thing, and having to confess it after to Father John, she'd like for once to be caught in the strong arms of him. Would she help him over the fence or not, with another look? But it wouldn't be fair to the poor fellow, and she liking him, too, in a way. It'd only be worse for him in the end, and she not loving him at all. . . . He that couldn't knock a tremor out of her! And the man she'd be in love with 'd shake her to bits. . . .

Joe at last found words: "The rain'll bring on the crops grand, thanks be to God."

"Joe, you'll be the death of me," she laughed. "And there 'll be plenty of water in the chapel well," she mimicked, "and Jamesy Curtin won't have to be drawing it all the way up the hill. . . . But I must be running off, or Betsy 'll be before me for the best vase."

"Betsy hadn't the courage to face the rain. How you came through it, Ann, as if you'd stepped out of a handbox, passes the wit of man to know."

"The right man 'd know I was a witch," she said, giving him the look she had determined to withhold.

"By God, you are," he said vehemently, his eyes glowing.

"But he'd know it without me telling him," she laughed, as she rushed into the chapel porch. . . . She wouldn't say but she had a leaning towards

him, with that look on him. And he had fine eyes, too, and was one of the best bowlers in the parish.

"It's in the front vase you'll be putting 'em for me, Jamesy," she said with a smile, handing the flowers to the old sacristan.

"It's in the bosom of the Blessed Virgin herself I'd be putting 'em for you for the one-tenth of a look like that. If I was only in me first youth! What's up with the young fellows these times, Ann, and you not swept off your feet long ago? Take the box from me, Dick Fahey, while I run in and fix them. And let nobody in without their ha'penny."

If Joe could only pay her a compliment like that, now and again, maybe it's the better she'd be thinking of him? Or if he'd talk to her like her grandfather or her Uncle Maurice? But she mustn't be thinking such thoughts in the House of God.

There was her grandfather already forgetting the world in front of the high altar, the steam from his clothes near keeping pace with his prayers. She had her Uncle Maurice to thank for not being steaming like the rest of them; and for there being one light dress in the chapel. . . . Sure God didn't mean everyone to be of a pattern; and she could pray as well in a hat as she could in a hood that hid her face. For that matter, her Uncle Maurice was as good a man as any already on their knees, and he'd be smoking his pipe outside till the last minute. . . . It was the grand blue cloak with gold stars on it the Blessed Virgin herself wore!

She knelt in front of the Virgin's altar, blessed herself, and murmured a Hail Mary.

Maybe it was the makings of a nun she had in her, and she not caring much for Joe Dunne?

But sure, she had put that fit over her and she in the Convent School. When Mother Evangelist had near coaxed her into being a lay Sister, didn't the Convent Chapel, all of a sudden, feel like the grave to her? And didn't she dream three nights running of a man kissing her up into the seventh heaven, only his face was hid from her. The nuns said the Blessed Virgin 'd be cross with her; but sure her own Blessed Virgin here in Brinney was smiling the next time she saw her, just like she was to-day. And why wouldn't she, and they both in the same boat, waiting for love to come to them? That look of content on the Virgin's face was because of the Angel telling her that her day was near at hand. . . .

Jamesy ought to separate the flowers a trifle more. There, that was better.

"Leave them be now, Jamesy," she muttered; and nodded approval to the old man's smile.

Maybe the sweet smell of the flowers 'd remind the Blessed Mother that she was waiting too. And if she wanted the world and all in a man, the Mother of God wouldn't be vexed with her. It was easy for Her to be humble, She being filled with the Holy Ghost and having God for a son. She could put up with poor St. Joseph, and he only a caretaker as you might say. But a poor girl like herself had only to take her chance, and if she missed it she might as well be dead. . . .

Joe Dunne wouldn't do at all, at all. Old Jamesy Curtin was right. It must be someone that 'd sweep her off her feet . . . with the nature of her grandfather and her Uncle Maurice in him, and more besides. . . .

There was some 'd be satisfied with kissing and

cuddling and having a child ; like Betsy Dunne who had set her heart on Tom. . . . Not but what she herself wanted a child too . . . bad ; but her man must shake her to the soul, like the beech woods in the autumn did ; and set her blood on fire like breasting the wind on the uplands at Knockbrack with her face to the sun. . . . The look of him, and the touch of his hand, must take her breath away, like the song of a bird often did, or a blue flower in a ditch, or a star in a pool. The God that made her what she was must surely have made her mate.

It was grand to be in the House of God, with His Blessed Mother reading her heart and understanding her in and out. . . . The roof above the altar, spangled with stars, was the same blue as the Virgin's cloak, reminding her of the floor of heaven at night. . . . The sun had near blotted out the pain of the Stations of the Cross on the whitewashed walls. . . .

No matter how black it was at home through the week, there was always this glory to come to of a Sunday, with nothing to hinder her speaking straight and friendly to God. And if Father John lifted his voice an odd time in a sermon with a flavour of anger in it, wasn't it well deserved ? But if you had the misfortune to sin 'tis he'd lift you out of the ditch as tenderly as if you were a baby.

'Tis she was the happy girl to have so many comforts in her life ; God, and his Blessed Mother, and more colours than she could count shining through the stained glass window ! Between them all she'd be sure to light on the right sort of husband.

If that wasn't the last bell! and there was Father John, strolling out as leisurely as if it was on the stroke of eight instead of being near nine.

“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.”

THIRD CHAPTER

ANN sang at her work. Tom and her mother were safely at second mass. Maurice was overhauling the boat, in the hope that the turn of the tide might bring a sea calm enough to try for herrings in the evening. Her grandfather was fussing about with the nets. It's something to do one 'd think she had, with the sleeves of her linsey rolled up beyond her elbows, and her skirt pinned up under her holland apron. And she having hardly anything to do at all! Her mother was a good warrant for that. Indeed, there was nothing at all in front of her now but to put on the cabbage and make the cake her mother asked for "in case a neighbour or two came in after dinner, and they'd be, maybe, liking a cup of tea." It must be someone very special she had in view, as it wasn't often they had butter in a cake. And her mother so lavish with it this time.

The place was looking clean enough even for a Finnegan, whichever of them was coming. Not but they always sniffed at the hook-lines and nets, and they thinking themselves far superior to the sea. The half of a ham and the fitch of bacon, hanging from the rafters, was nothing at all to what the Finnegans could boast of. One of them wouldn't be in the house ten minutes before they'd be making comparisons of a public-house

and a thirty acre farm with the stripe of eight acres helped out by the fishing.

Poor Ounshucks! it's little pleasure they had out of life, and their minds always set on scraping a shilling to put in the heel of a stocking. Back there in the hollow behind Brinney, where they lived, they could hardly smell the sea at all, let alone feast their eyes on it. And if the sea fought agin people itself, and was often fierce and raging, and maybe broke them in the end, didn't it give them the world's delight while they were alive? Wasn't there something grand even in being took by it, instead of lying underneath six foot of clay.

She laughed, pushed back her hair and stood at the open door. Who'd think of dying on a day like this, and everything calling on her to live? Look at her grandfather, with the step of a young man on him, and he deludering himself that he wasn't working on a Sunday by being in his white shirt sleeves and his stiff collar! And the sea smiling and beckoning at her! If it was only after Whitsun, she'd leave the cake to look after itself, and have a dip. But it wasn't worth while to risk her luck, and everything shining on her . . . though she was sure nothing could go wrong with her to-day. . . . She could breast waves ten times higher than them half-spent things, that had little kick left in them now except for playing. . . . To run bare naked along the strand, and dry herself in the warm breeze, 'd be heaven itself.

"Uncle Maurice," she shouted. "Did you ever feel that you could fly out of your skin?"

"Often and often."

"And what did you do?"

“Why, I flew out of it of course.”

“And what did you do then?”

“I cooled myself in the sea, or the like.”

“That’d make me only ten times madder. If I dipped in it this minute it’d make me drunk. I am drunk, and that’s the truth. I feel laughing and singing going on inside of me. The shapes of things and the colour of them, the wind in my face, even the smell of that tar is like strong drink to me—like the wine you once brought home from Sicily, not Uncle Matt’s logwood.”

“You’ve took it bad.”

“What?”

“I can smell the cake burning on you from here,” he laughed.

“Bad scran to me, but so it is. What will my mother say?”

Wasn’t it the luck of the world that it was only a little patch underneath, that could be scraped off, without spoiling the look of it! Even the smell of hot bread was grand to-day. She was happier than any queen, and her bread as light as a feather. The colour of it was the right kind of goldy brown. The jugs were laughing and blinking at her. But what else could she expect, and God and His Blessed Mother so good to her at mass? And Father John himself wishing her luck on his way out from the sacristy; and Betsy Dunne admiring her new hat and her new dress, and she meeting her going to second mass?

“That’s what I call a cake. It’s the grand wife you’ll make yet for a man.”

Praise from her mother was as rare as snow in May. The pleasantest sort of tang in her voice, too! What a day it was for wonders!

“Ye had a short sermon. It’s tired Father John must be.”

“Short and sweet. Anyway, he lashed them that badly wanted it, so that you could see them smarting under it. Run away now, put on your cotton, and freshen yourself up a bit.”

“Isn’t my linsey good enough?”

“Be said and led by the mother that bore you, who knows what’s good for you. And give a rub up to the Britannia metal teapot. But no, I’ll do that myself; and I’ll wash up too, so that you needn’t be soiling your hands. I’ll dish the dinner and all. Here, take my cloak to the room with you, and throw me out my apron. Your Uncle Matt is coming in after the dinner, with a friend, and we must put the best face we can on us. The Finnegans are used to the best.”

It was, maybe, Aunt Kate that was coming with Uncle Matt, from the flurry her mother was in, and she always a little in dread of Aunt Kate. There was hardly anyone else she’d bring out the best teapot for. Wasn’t it the godsend that she was in such high good humour? It was a great day surely. There was no doubt the cotton was more in keeping with it than the linsey.

She stood in front of the cracked, speckled looking-glass, propped against the window sash. It was hard to know how she looked from the likes of that of a makeshift; but, by all accounts, she could pass. There was them that said that her nose was blunted at the tip, but it didn’t take from her somehow. And she didn’t run to red anywhere. Though her hands were hard itself with the work, they were shapely. And carrying creels on her head, gave her a good stand. It was queer though

of her Uncle Maurice and her grandfather to be comparing her to trees and the like. Heigh, ho! it was like a wild thing of the woods she felt, that the horned men used to be hunting in the old times. They were great times, Glory be to God. To run and run from the man of your choice, and you wanting to be caught all the while, with hope in your eyes, and wonder and love mounting up in your heart.

“What’s keeping you in there, Ann? We are all sitting down.”

Her mother was surpassing herself more and more, with that kindness in her voice, though she seemed to have a bad effect on the others. Her grandfather looked as if he was vexed with the bacon, and Tom had an uneasy face on him. Even Maurice wasn’t as good humoured as usual.

“The dress wasn’t money thrown away after all. But it looks a bit bare about the neck. I’ll give you the silver pin with the doggeen on it that my own mother gave me.”

Ann could hardly believe her ears.

“You will?” she muttered, her eyes wide open, her lips parted.

“Ate a good dinner, Ann. You’ll need it all,” her grandfather groaned, piling her plate high.

Maurice laughed:

“It’s little dinner Ann wants, and the May in it. It’s a good warrant she’ll be to choose her own man when her day comes.”

“Leave the girl alone, Maurice Logan, and don’t be filling her head with rameis. It’s the biddable girl she always was, and she isn’t likely to take the bit between her teeth now. It’s to listen to her mother she always will.”

“ It’s to listen to you we all have to, Julia, if that does you any good. Most of us go our own way after.”

“ Without a roof to your head, Maurice Logan ! ”

“ It’s what’s in your head and in your heart that matters. Not what’s over it. A man wandering the world with a bundle on his back might find the happiness he’d miss in many a big house.”

“ A few old shirts and a ganzy and the like ! It’s a sight to boast of after your thirty year.”

“ It’s the bad sight you have. I bet Ann sees more in it ? ”

“ Sure I do, Uncle Maurice. Isn’t there the whole world in it. Isn’t it often I envied your old brogues the places they had stood in. To hear about them delights, let alone seeing them, near chokes me. To be there with one you’d love—oh ! ”

Ann’s sigh was lost in her mother’s angry sniff :

“ Without a sock to his foot ! or a sixpence to pay for his bed ! Love in my eye ! What is it but a will o’ the wisp—if it’s even that ? A young girl’s fancy for a minute, maybe. Leave yourself to me, Ann, and I’ll put a slated roof over your head, and give you a room with a horsehair sofa in it, and a girl to wait on your wants, and money in the bank and six feather beds, no less.”

Ann laughed :

“ Is it to smother me you want ? And where are you hiding the man ? It’s the fairy prince entirely he must be, to live up to all that.”

Her mother beamed : “ Let ye finish your dinners now and leave him to me.”

Ann was in a whirl of thoughts and emotions. Deep down in her was a pleasant excited feeling of expectation : of something about to happen

that her whole being seemed to go out to. But, if her mother had a hand in it, was he likely to be the right man? Her grandfather and her Uncle Maurice weren't pleased. And it was never how a great lover came to a girl, with a mother planning it, and with talk of slated roofs and the like?

She tried to drive away her doubts. When she shut her eyes hope was on top, but doubt was strongest when she opened them and looked round the table. Her mother had that pleased, calculating air that she wore when there was a good haul of fish. Tom shuffled, like as if he was ashamed of himself, and wouldn't meet her eye. Her grandfather had a pinched look. The bit of cabbage on his white shirt showed how worried he was, and he such a dainty feeder. The piece of black ribbon he wore for a tie was pulled all askew, as if he had been dragging at it to ease his throat. He only did that when he was very much flustered. She couldn't see Maurice's eyes; but, from the wagging of his beard, she knew he was laughing. No matter what happened he'd never leave her in the lurch; nor would her grandfather either. Besides, it might be alright. A man might have a slated house itself, and still be all a girl could wish for.

What would he be like at all? Someone with a great dash in him, that'd be as kind and true as her grandfather, and have the fun of her Uncle Maurice in him? A man she could talk to, and they alone of a night, and look at the stars with . . .

"God save ye all. Is it intruding we are, and ye still in front of the food?"

She started. That oily voice was her Uncle Matt's. It'd be a bad job entirely if he had

anything to do with the marrying of her. She shivered under her mother's push.

"Run, Ann, and open the half-door to your Uncle Matt. Intruding indeed? It's as welcome as the flowers in May ye both are. It's the misfortune that what dinner there was is inside of us long since. But sure, there'll be a cup of tea and hot cake in a minute."

Ann tried to smile as her Uncle Matt shook her hand. She looked beyond her Uncle's big bulk to see who was scraping the doorstep. Foxy Luke himself!

"Ha, ha, ha, if it isn't scared she's looking. But we'll soon bring the blushes back to her cheeks. Won't we, Luke?"

How she hated that laugh of Uncle Matt's! And her last hope was gone if Luke Finnegan had a hand in it. No wonder the blood was like ice at her heart. If it was matchmaking they were, and there was every sign of it, what sort of a man'd choose Luke to talk for him? Her Uncle Matt was bad enough, but the shifty eyes of Luke'd make any girl afeared.

"Shake hands with Luke Finnegan, Ann agra. Can't you see his hand out? I never saw such a girl, and it jumping out of your skin for joy you ought to be. One would think the wits had gone from you. Give way to your mother then, if it's bashful you are. A hundred thousand welcomes to you, Luke."

Ann rubbed her hand on her dress. It always put a shiver through her to shake hands with Luke. And to-day it was worse than ever. Like the feeling she had in handling a dogfish. It's little sign there was of welcome except from her

mother. Her grandfather was standing on the hearthstone as stiff as a ramrod, fire in his eyes, and it's well it became him. Maurice was laughing into his pipe. Nothing 'd ever abash her Uncle Matt, but Luke was wriggling under the chilly welcome.

"Won't ye have a seat?" Pat Logan said, without moving.

"To be sure they will. Bring them chairs from the table, Tom."

Her mother's triumphant look at her, as Tom moved the chairs, made Ann stand, half dazed, by the end of the settle. Her blushes were fire searing her flesh. All inside her she was cold. It was like as if she was two people, one of whom heard a thing, knew it and felt the horror of it, while the other saw it printed on a wall without being able to understand it. Just as if the soul within her wouldn't believe what her senses told her. The same thing happened to her when her mother first struck her. . . . There was no mistaking now what it all meant. But she couldn't believe it. She wouldn't believe it.

She sat down, cowering back in the corner of the settle. Dead-like in her soul she was in the face of so much cruelty, a great shame on her for them that could do it. . . . But it couldn't be true. No one could do it. In a dream she was. Good God! was she going mad? It was like as if the house was closing in about her, to crush her. No, it was only some sudden weakness. It was passing already. . . . Nothing on earth 'd make her marry that image of a man. That was the way to take it. She was feeling better. Hadn't she strong arms on her; and couldn't she

rise enough to take her to America? If she could get a drink of water she'd be able for anything.

She opened her eyes. It was a good omen that her Uncle Maurice was taking it all so lightly, or he wouldn't be smiling at her. Why couldn't she take her fun out of them too? It'd be a great joke on her though, if all her dreams were to end in Luke Finnegan. . . . There was no fun at all in it. The very look of him near made her sick. She felt as if she was soiled all over. As if her purity, that Mother Evangelist talked of, was dragged in the mud. . . .

Not that they'd move her grandfather easy, with that frown on him. He was gathering into a storm, and he'd burst yet. He was only a small man in inches, but he was so straight and simple in his mind, that he had great power in him when it came to settling a thing. She could see from the way Matt and Luke were eyeing him that they hadn't the same confidence that her mother had. There was less bounce about Matt, and Luke's legs were shuffling near as fast as his eyes. And 'twas easy to see that Tom was wishing himself anywhere else.

She wished someone 'd speak and have it out. She'd have to laugh or cry in a minute, the way the rattling of the teacups was getting on her nerves in the heat of the sun and the fire. If only she was up on Knockbrack now. . . . She could see green water, the long rolls of the waves stretching themselves out, lazy like, after the flurry of the storm. And there'd be wind in her face like the softest of kisses with the smell of heather in them, and dreams and dreams . . .

“Have a cup of strong tea, Luke, to warm

you. And a slice of the cake that Ann baked special."

"Thank you, Julia, I will. Though it's a lot of heat I have inside me to-day."

Ann got up, went to the dresser for an empty cup and took a drink from the bucket beside the back door, the feeling on her that it would take more than the water to rinse the bad taste out of her mouth.

"And why wouldn't he, and the high stepper he'll be getting?" Matt laughed.

"Who'll be getting what?" Pat Logan thundered.

Matt slapped his coat pocket. "The best of John Jameson all the time in my pocket! Bring me a glass, Julia, till I pour out a bumper for your father-in-law there, in honour of the day that's in it."

"Bring me a cup of hot tea, Ann, like a good girl, to cool me before I forget myself. Thank you all the same, Matt Finnegan."

Matt rubbed his chin with the quart bottle:

"It's few in this world knows what's good for them. A drop for you, Maurice?"

He half filled the tumbler which Mrs. Logan handed him, and held it up to the light: "Like gold run into liquid it is."

Maurice pushed back the glass.

"There's what you might call a chill in the air, May and all as it is," Matt shrugged his shoulders. "But we were often before up agin the like in our day, Luke, and we conquered. A drop of whisky is always a help. Take this to fortify you. And what's the odds, I say, when the women are with us?"

“I will, Matt. Not too much. The heart is leaping in me. All the trumps in our hand, you might say.”

Matt nodded, rolling his under lip over his upper lip. “Take a thimbleful yourself, Julia.”

“I will then, and thank you, Matt. But have no fear on you, I passed my word, and no one can gainsay me.”

“Except the girl herself,” Maurice said between two puffs of his pipe.

“Exactly!” Matt smiled at Ann, who sat now, almost emptied of feeling on a stool between Maurice and her grandfather. “It’s often I said to the wife, Kate, I said, it’s the good religious girl Ann Logan is, the way she prays before the Virgin’s Altar. There’s a girl, I said, that knows her duty to God and man. What does the catechism say? Honour your father and your mother. Her father, God rest him, being dead, it stands to reason and religion that she’ll do what her mother bids her.”

Mrs. Logan wiped her eyes with her apron and said with fervour: “Father John himself couldn’t put it sounder.”

“Couldn’t you come to the point, Matt?” Luke said, with a nervous laugh. “I always like to strike the nail quick.”

“It’s seldom I seen a more handsome young lover,” Maurice laughed. “Like one you’d dream about, eh, Ann?”

“Handsome is as handsome does,” Mrs. Logan shouted. “When a Logan has as much money in the bank as Luke Finnegan has, it’ll be time for him to speak. Have a round of the cake all of ye and another cup of tea, and we’ll begin to talk.”

"Sit down, woman, and don't choke me," Pat Logan said quietly. "Quit this fooling, Matt Finnegan, and if you have anything to say, say it."

Ann watched and listened, terrified but confident, a shoulder resting on Maurice's arm and a hand on her grandfather's knee. She could feel her uncle laughing, without a sound coming out of him; and see her grandfather's grim face. The laugh of the one and the look of the other meant the same thing: to stand by her. She might have known it of them. But her mother had hurt her past repair. To want to marry her to that foxy old man was to kill her soul and every hope and dream she ever had. She didn't mind her uncle Matt, with his false face and talk. There were people in the world like that. And, if they were uncles itself, they were outside you. But a mother was different. . . .

Matt Finnegan ended a whispered conversation with Luke, cleared his throat, and stuck his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat:

"If there is people who won't wait on the decencies of a proposal there's no man can be shorter than myself. My friend and namesake here, Luke Finnegan, wants Ann for a wife. Answer me that, Pat Logan?"

"Why would you be asking him at all and I giving her?" Mrs. Logan shouted, jumping off her chair.

"Be quiet, Julia. There's an orderly way of doing things. After all, he's the man of the house and the owner—the nominal owner I ought to say, seeing that everything is pledged to Luke—of the house and land and the boat. Answer me, Pat Logan?"

“Answer him, Ann,” the old man said, patting her hand.

“Don’t open your lips, girl.” Matt waved her off sternly. “What could a young, innocent girl like you have to say in such a matter? Mark my words, Pat Logan, it’s a great deal hangs on the answer.”

“Answer him, Ann,” the old man repeated quietly

“Are you sure it’s not Julia you want, Luke?” Maurice asked. “Matt says it’s no affair of Ann’s.”

“It’s the young one I want.” Luke spluttered. Ann shrank back from the wolfish face.

“I’d be afeared, grandfather. I couldn’t. I won’t. I’d lie dead first in Tully cove.”

Her grandfather stroked her head. After a long pause, he said :

“And if that was all the choice that lay between her and you, Luke Finnegan, it’s my help she’d have in it. You’ve got your answer.”

“That’s my answer, is it, Pat Logan?” Luke shouted in a frenzied voice, shaking his fist. “One hundred and sixty-three pounds odd you owe me. I’ll leave you without house or home or a boat or a net or a hook. To the poorhouse I’ll send you and yours.”

“That’s between you and your God. Fifty-five pounds was all I ever had off you, and I’ve paid you hundreds.”

“The poorhouse—I’ll skin you bare—not a shirt to your back,” Luke screamed, foam on his lips. “And costs—the biggest I can mount up on you.”

Mrs. Logan knocked down a chair in her excite-

ment: "Let me talk to Pat Logan. It's I can read the Logans for him, and their romancing. To reduce me and my little family to this pass! My seven curses on you, Pat Logan, this blessed day. Don't heed him, Luke. What is he but a doddering old man, without any sense in him. And it's to bring that fool of a girl to reason I will, if I had to beat it into her."

"Easy now. Easy all of ye." Matt restrained his sister with one arm and held Luke by the shoulder. "Pat Logan hasn't fully grasped the affair. You were over hasty, Luke. Sit down, Julia, and hold your whist."

He forced Luke into his chair and whispered to him. Luke looked scared, and said reluctantly:

"I'll leave it all to you, Matt."

Matt smiled:

"Now we can begin business. Are you sitting, Julia? I won't deny that when myself and Luke came in we intended to bargain. But we have decided, like sensible men, to lay all our cards on the table. There's Luke with seventy acres of land, well stocked, and a two-story slated house, and money piled up, and money out at grass. And what is there on the other side? Seven or eight acres of a sandy stripe, a boat and gear, a few beasts and a pile of debts. Was the like ever heard of before? Here's the richest man in the whole parish, that could have his choice of half a dozen girls, with whacking fortunes at their backs, and he comes and makes a sort of queen of the poorest girl in it. That's valuing her at a thumping price in itself. But he goes farther than that. Every penny of the hundred and sixty-three pounds you owe him he'll wipe out. And to put the

crown on it all," his voice shook with emotion, "he'll make a deed—not a will, mind you, that could be tore up—giving her every penny he has at his death, childre or no childre. A power of money! a power of money!"

He spoke the last words with awe, took off his hat and wiped his wet forehead with the red handkerchief he drew from the crown.

"Not a word yet," he waved the handkerchief, "till it all sinks in."

Mrs. Logan insisted on filling his tumbler, murmuring:

"They'd have the heart of a stone that wouldn't be moved by your eloquent tongue, Matt. The delicacy of it. And him not having many years to live maybe. And she to be driving in her sidecar!"

"Whist, I tell you."

"Don't stifle a mother's heart and it bursting for joy, and Luke more than a trifle deaf anyway. And Tom could marry any day, with the burthen of the debt off him."

Ann could not take her eyes off Luke. 'Twas he mattered and not her mother's callousness. His dreadful threat to her grandfather unnerved her. They'd be put out of the land and the house, and the boat taken from them, all on the head of her. He'd do it too, with them long skinny fingers that were like claws. And he'd claw at her like he clawed at the money, and bully her and gloat over her. A weak, cruel mouth he had; and mean, cringing, scared eyes when they weren't lit in anger. To be put up to auction to the likes of him! She clenched her hands in despair. And her grandfather loved every sod of the land! Him to be

rooted up, and he near seventy-five! She'd do anything in the world to prevent that.

She shrank back, cold sweat breaking out all over her. To live in the same house with Luke, to have him touch her . . . and they spoke of childre. She shook like an aspen, her teeth chattering.

"Have sense. They can't harm you," Maurice whispered. "Tell them to go to hell, father, before they kill the child."

"I'd work for you till my hands were wore to the bone." She clutched her grandfather's knee. "I'm tore to pieces. My blood is like water in me with fear and terror. It's the red and yellow eyes of him or something. Maybe if I got time, I might be able to see different."

Her grandfather drew her head towards him: "I'd kill you with my own hands first."

She felt the warmth of the fire again. There was the kettle singing, just as if the heat had never gone out of the world. But sure it hadn't; and the sun dancing on the brass candlesticks on the shelf above the settle. Maybe her dream, that was near blown to flitters, 'd come back to her? She snuggled her head against her grandfather.

He stroked her hair, knocked out his pipe against the heel of his brogue and said:

"Tom, run out and try and gather a few of the neighbours. We'll run down the boat and have her ready for the night."

Matt Finnegan rubbed his hands: "It's the great fisherman Pat Logan always was. But let us finish our little negotiation first. I saw ye colloguing over there in the corner. Never fear but

my little explanation put a different colour on the matter. Is it a bargain ? ”

“ Of course it is. And it’s beholden to Luke we all are for his generous offer,” Mrs. Logan screamed.

“ Run and do my bidding, Tom,” Pat said with authority.

“ I want to hear what answer you give them first.”

“ Is it a grandson of mine not to know my answer ? Go at once, I tell you. It’s ashamed of you I am, and you not to be beforehand with me in giving it. Your own sister and all ! ”

“ My God ! It’s to break us he will. I don’t want to force her. But couldn’t she put up with him ? It’ll be the end of everything if she don’t.”

“ You’d give Betsy Dunne to him, would you ? You’d be the first to wring his neck if he even asked for her. And you’d give him your sister, to save your own skin ? Out of my sight with you for a man, you that ought to be a Logan.”

“ It’s my own son he is, with ten times the sense of a Logan.”

Matt put his hand over his sister’s mouth. “ Whist, woman, I tell you. Anyhow, you’re in favour of it, Tom ? ”

“ Go to hell,” Tom said, with a scowl, striding out of the kitchen.

Matt’s eyes bulged. He jumped to his feet and waved his hands. “ Is it mad you are, Pat Logan ? Is it mad ye all are ? Where’s your religion, Ann, not to do your mother’s bidding ? All the sweat I wasted to screw Luke up to them terms ! Have ye any heart in ye ? ”

“ Have they gone out of my house yet ? ” Pat Logan growled to the fire,

Maurice laughed: "It's waiting they are to help us to shove down the boat."

Matt drew himself to his full height and glared:
"Your blood be on your own heads. I disown ye—I disown ye. If ye come begging for a crumb, and ye on the way to the poorhouse, it's to spurn ye from the door I will. Ye fools, ye. Come, Luke, there's as good fish in the sea as ever was caught."

Luke, panting, struggled to his feet. He screwed round an end of his dragged moustache and gnawed at it, muttering feebly as he went out:
"I'll skin them—skin them, skin them."

Mrs. Logan sat, collapsed, in her chair.

"Stir up, woman," Pat Logan said gently.
"The tea isn't cold yet. Have a cup and you'll see things more rational. You brought all this on yourself."

"You've drove me to my grave, Pat Logan, and now you're taking the roof from over my head. My seven curses on every Logan that ever stepped."

"Come and help us down with the boat, Ann," Maurice whispered. "It won't be comfortable for you here till the weather clears a bit."

"Will he break us, grandfather?" she asked, tears in her eyes, all her fears returned.

"Don't be foolish, girleen. No one can break you but yourself," Maurice said, pressing her arm.
"I'll have a talk with my father and see what can be done. Skin a Logan to the bone and he'll have a kick in him still."

FOURTH CHAPTER

ANN changed quickly into her linsey. . . . If only she could get as quick out of the house, away from her mother's screaming in the kitchen!

She fixed the broken handle of a broom as a bar to the thin, ill-fitting door. That 'd keep her mother out; if she took the notion, when she got tired of knocking about the tea things and the tin cans, to come in and barge her to her face. There was a venom in her tongue this evening that was past belief. It used often to be funny enough to hear her read out the Logans. At the worst, she wore off like a shower of rain from a sandy road. But she hurted now, hurted dreadful . . . hurted so much, maybe, because of the queer feeling she herself had within her: a sort of deadness and emptiness. But, dead and all as she was, she had raw edges to her, so that the scolding scraped her like a jagged knife. It'd be dreadful to have it going on all through the evening, and in bed at night, herself and her mother alone in the house if the men took out the boat.

That's what she'd do. She'd go out in the boat with them. There'd be a young moon. With the help of it and the stars, and the talk of the water, the boat rising and falling on it, she'd, maybe, come back to herself and be able to face the morning.

Hark! there was a blessed silence. Her mother

must have gone out to look after the pigs. There was Maurice tramping about in the loft, changing out of his Sunday things. Her grandfather had got as far as kicking off his brogues to put on his sea boots. It was a great help to have him so near, with only the partition between them.

She sat on the edge of the bed and wrung her hands. It was no use trying to forget things. . . . Sure she hadn't forgotten them at all, and they pressing on her all the time like a gravestone. Her own hurt, though she'd never get over it and they wanting to sell her like a young bonnave, was nothing at all. At least it wasn't the worst, though it pulled the world down around her. It was worse about her grandfather.

There she was again, thinking about herself, and he thinking only of her. And she the cause of it all. God knew she'd stand the hurt to herself, and the breaking of her pride and all her dreams, if she could only save him.

If they could only get a good run of fish? But, sure, they never had any luck. She could work, and Maurice would help? Her grandfather would always be sure then of a bite and sup. But what was that to the heart-scald that 'd be on him if they turned him out of Clasheen?

There must be some way out of it all? There'd have to be a way. She'd pray to the Blessed Virgin. She'd pound at the gates of Heaven till God 'd answer her. If the air wasn't pressing on her like lead, and her thoughts racing from her like wrack in a storm, she might be able to think of something. There was her mother back again.

"Ann, come out to me. Come out here on the floor to me till I tell you what you are."

Anything but that. She was like the spring of the old clock: another twist and she'd break. Out through the window she'd go. The sight of the sea was the only thing that could ease her. But, maybe, that had gone back on her, too?

She let herself down through the open lower sash into the backyard, crept past the door of the kitchen, and, through a gap, into the paddock.

It was more beautiful than ever, with the grass quivering against the black shadows. Shouting out with joy everything was, after the rain. The crab tree in the corner was like a lot of girls after a dance, laughing with flushed faces; and the May tree reminded her of a girl in her marriage dress. . . . Only now there was pain in seeing it all. . . . They weren't a part of her as they used to be, filling her up till they seemed to be her own blood and breath. . . . More like a stranger she was to them, a sort of heartache on her for something she could never have. Not but they were calling to her louder and sweeter than ever. There was the sky peeping through the blossoms, a grander blue than the Blessed Virgin's cloak; and the blackbirds singing just like the angels before the throne of God; and the scent of the blossoms was like the breath of the Blessed Virgin herself. They all got in, a bit of the way, to her senses; and she felt on the verge of the pleasure she used to have out of them. But her heart was froze up and couldn't open itself out fully to them. She wouldn't give in to it. Back of the deadness in her there was something that wanted to burst out, a sort of fierce longing, like a river that was dammed up. She couldn't make herself out at all, at all. Only there was an ache in her soul

worse than all the pains she ever had in her body. . . .

No, she wouldn't go near the pretended house under the privet bushes. She'd be afeared of it. Afeared of the sea, too, to-day, and of Knockbrack. It was the dream inside her that had got a blow. It wasn't killed, or there wouldn't be any light in the sky at all. It was only stunned like. The offer of Luke Finnegan 'd make any girl reel. It was like stumbling into a heap of manure, only worse. It was like stumbling into hell, and she thinking she was on the sure road to heaven; only in hell itself she might be able to keep her self-respect. . . .

It wasn't a king or a fairy prince she wanted. But he must be a king to her. It wasn't a stocked place that mattered. She wouldn't care if he had only all he stood up in. But he must be able to feel what the sky and the sea said to them, and they on the top of a hill at sundown. It was a lover she wanted that 'd make her heart and her mind lep, not a keg of sovereigns—though the likes of him 'd make them spin too. Nor a whole house full of feather beds. A man she wanted, that she could walk the world with in a bleak March wind, or in the heat of an August day, carrying beauty with them, and always finding more on the far side of the hill. . . .

She could smell the blossoms again. And the grass was like green fire dancing. The blackbird's song was in her blood. She could dance to the music of it, and she would.

“ Is it mad you are ? ”

What did Tom know about living? She'd show him what it was to feel the May. She'd

dance with the crab tree for a partner. If the stunted old trunk, and the sun on it, wasn't like the god her grandfather had a song about, that used to dance through the woods, a great mane of hair on him, all garlanded with flowers!

"How could you have the heart to dance, and the trouble that's on us?"

"Cross Tom," she panted; and then stopped, rigid, as if she had been struck. For a moment one foot was suspended in the air, her wide skirt caught up in her outstretched hands. The colour left her face and her skirt fell limply to her sides.

"I forgot," she said in a scared whisper. "Do you think he'll do it?"

"Sell us up? He'd roast us alive. Whatever chance I had of Betsy, it's good-bye to it now."

"There's that too. But it's my grandfather I was thinking of."

"It's yourself you were thinking of, you selfish thing. What does it matter to an old man? But see me, with all my life before me? Sorra other girl I'll ever get like Betsy, and she like putty in my hands. No one in the parish could hold a candle to her for good looks."

"Do you think so now? Well, maybe Luke'll cast his eye on her."

She watched Tom's swarthy face darken with passion, a lurking smile on her lips.

"I'd brain him if he as much as looked at her." He glowered as he kicked a clod of earth half way across the paddock.

"And you'd give *me* to him? It's the unselfish brother you are surely!"

"It isn't like as if you were gone on a man. Think of what you'd be in a couple of years;

with him in his grave and all his gear at your back. The choice of the whole world before you. And the Dunnes 'll never let me have Betsy now, with nothing behind me."

"You told them to go to hell in the house."

"A sort of weakness came over me, through your peaked face. The full brunt of what it meant to me didn't strike me till after. I'll have to go to the States and leave Betsy behind."

"Couldn't you take her with you?"

"Is it the Dunnes to give a fortune to a landless man? A farthing they wouldn't give me with her. I'll find it hard to make up enough for my own passage, let alone to pay the cost of her and pay the priest. And I could never make my way in America, and me having another mouth to feed. Though it's damn sorry I'll be not to have her."

"That kind of sorrow 'll be a great help to her! Is it a man at all you are? And what'll happen to the rest of us?"

Her bitterness stung him. She watched in his face a struggle between shame and anger.

"You're the nice one to speak," he blustered. "And you bringing it all on the top of us. With the debt cleared off, the way'd be paved for me and Betsy. It's the downright thoughtless girl you are."

Her anger was rising, but she did her best to restrain it. The Finnegan streak in him! But he couldn't help that, and God giving it to him. Besides, he did tell them to go to hell. He had that streak in him, too. It was well covered, but Betsy must have got down to it, or how could she love him at all? And no matter what Tom was, without him, Betsy 'd be left with a broken heart.

"I'm the misfortunate girl to everyone," she cried.

"There now, there now. The tears will bring you to reason."

"I couldn't. I couldn't. It'd dirty my soul. Some sort of light inside me 'd be put out. The sort of light that helps me to see behind all the lights that ever were."

"What are you talking about at all? Can't you have sense in you?"

"I have a glimmer of it in me now and again," she said, with a weary smile. "Not what people misname sense, and that only a sort of crookedness of the mind and heart; but the sense that comes to one, for a second or two, through an opening in a drift of cloud near the sunset, or the like."

"Is it mad you are? What could you see there but the sky?"

She laughed:

"It's a born Finnegan you are. If you were a Logan now, you could see love and life and a power of other things in that old crab tree, and get a glimpse at the truth, maybe, through a rift in a cloud."

"What I want to see is how to hold on to the land," he shouted, with an angry gesture. "I can tell you the truth without looking at the back of a cloud for it. You're driving your grandfather to the poorhouse, and me to America, and my mother and yourself to God knows where. And the man mightn't live a week! I have it for certain that he has a mortal disease on him. He doesn't know it himself, but the doctor told my Uncle Matt."

She shrank back, horrified.

“ And you were in all that ? ”

She flushed with anger. But it died away, almost with her words. The thought of her grandfather in the poorhouse, made her tremble. It'd never be that maybe ; but it'd be just as bad for him, whatever makeshift they'd strive to fix up for him.

“ Don't look as pale as a ghost, with the shakes all over you. God's truth, I had qualms over it myself ; but what was a man to do, and the hole I'm in over Betsy, and all.”

She watched a blue tit on the crab tree. What stock it took of them, with its wary little eyes ! Tom had been watching her grandfather all his life, and couldn't get further now than a worried face over what was as clear as daylight. It's the hard life Betsy 'd have whether she got him or whether she didn't. But sure as she wanted him, it's worse she'd be without him.

“ I might speak to Joe Dunne, and get him to do something to make it easier for Betsy and yourself.”

“ You might just as well speak to a stone wall, and me without the prospect of the place. 'Tisn't too keen he'd be in any case, and the poor way we have.”

“ Joe has more heart in him than all that,” she said with a listless smile.

Tom's look at her made her blush. Thinking he might be, that there was something between herself and Joe. But there wasn't, not on her side anyway.

“ He'd never do it. He's too cautious a man.” Tom kicked a tussock of grass with a worried foot, his hands deep in his trousers pockets, and added doubtfully :

"It's a power of money to give away and he getting nothing in."

"It isn't so much it'd be: her passage, and the priest, and five or ten pounds to start ye."

"It's not of that I'm thinking at all," Tom shouted excitedly. "It's just a chance, but it'd be the making of me . . . and of my grandfather and my mother and yourself," he added after a pause. "It'd settle everything. We could pay off that scut Luke Finnegan, and snap our fingers at him."

"How?" she asked, trembling.

But she knew what was in his mind as she asked the question. It had to do with her marrying Joe. It didn't hurt her like the thought of marrying Luke Finnegan, not in the same way at least. But it brought a great blackness on the day and a great dread to her heart. . . . What was Tom saying?

"No man in his senses 'd do it. But Joe's weak on you, there's that to be said. Still, who ever heard of a hundred and sixty-three pounds coming into a stripe with a girl, and she well favoured? And you without a penny to your back! And Joe more careful of money than the next man. A hundred and sixty-three pounds for a girl, except the man was a gombeener like Luke, with one foot in the grave, is beyond reason. But damme! if it isn't worth trying for, and it our only chance. . . . There's my grandfather calling, and me not gone for the men yet. The head is buzzing in me. I'll just run over and get Joe. The four of us, and you at the rollers, can manage the boat. And I'll be able to sound him at my leisure."

"For God's sake, don't," she cried, catching at his arm.

He shook her off.

"What are you afraid of now? And Joe as decent a man as myself, with over twenty acres of arable! Coxswain of the lifeboat too, and he hardly depending on the fish at all! It isn't a born fool you are, and what he can do for the whole of us? It's him I'm afeared of. The thought of losing so much money 'd drive any man desperate. It's the nice fix you've put us all in, with your whimsies."

She watched Tom jump the low wall on to the lane, a strained look in her eyes. She had some sort of will to call him back. Her lips moved, but no sound came. Thoughts, in little images, and emotions, were jostling inside her: Betsy laughing, the look of relief on Tom's face, Joe Dunne's strong arms, the hard look in his eyes and lips, the soft look there was often in them for her, Tom kissing Betsy behind the fruit bushes, a longing for something she didn't know what, a blank feeling of disappointment and fear, a tightening of her nerves, hostility, repulsion; and, at the back of everything, like a bell tolling at a distance, her grandfather bright in his Sunday shirt sleeves and Sunday shave, smoking his short black clay pipe as he leant contentedly against the post of the house door. . . .

There was Tom crossing the Dunne's meadow towards the house, and it gleaming in the sun, a new coat of whitewash on it. Joe had all them virtues. She could see the goldy patches of new thatch against the old brown. He wouldn't let a thing go out of repair. Everything 'd go by the

clock, and the clock 'd be on time. God! if she only knew what to do?

She threw herself down on the grass and wept convulsively. If it wasn't one, it was another. Her mother 'd be at her again, and Tom, and the whole brood of the Finnegans, selling her like a pig. And she'd never roam the Bruagh mountains now, with the man of her choice. It was often she planned it, and they calling her from across the plain, and she on the top of Knockbrack of an evening, a sort of purple haze on them that tugged at her heart. And he'd feel the same. They'd set out at the first streak of light, and wade the river at Lekan ford, and be on Bruagh peak before the heat of the day. Not a rush by the roadside that they wouldn't make love out of. And they'd look down on seven counties from the top; and nothing that they could see, would be wider or deeper than the love in them. There'd be glens with green water rushing down them, singing what was in her heart and his, and mossy banks in cool shadows, to lie on. And the walk home, under the stars.

She pressed her face against the grass and wished she was dead. If she could only catch her death of cold! But the grass might be ten times wetter, and she couldn't. It was the long life threatened her, unless she was drowned or something. And Joe 'd never even let her go out in the boat at night. He didn't think it decent for a woman. He'd freeze her into a statue, and she sitting there fornint him at meals, and of an evening; and his Aunt Peggy 'd hate her. . . .

What 'd it be like to kiss him? He'd do that right enough, for it's often and often he wanted to . . . anyway, it wouldn't be the opening of

heaven that she often dreamt of. It was more like a limp, wet rag she felt this minute than a fiery lover. . . . She couldn't do it. The very thought of Joe left her as desolate as the flat under a sleet storm in winter, greyness over everything; and Knockbrack and the sea trying which of 'em could scowl the blackest. Maybe love was only all a dream and poets' talk? . . . Anyhow, she'd have gratitude to the man that 'd save her grandfather! She could stifle down things.

She sprang to her feet. She must get away from herself. Couldn't them blackbirds shut up? What call was on them to be lovemaking? or that scent to be on the apple blossoms?

There was her grandfather, in his ganzy and tarred trousers; and her Uncle Maurice with a serious look enough on him now, when he thought no one was looking. Maybe, all her fears were for nothing, and Joe 'd baulk at parting from so much money?

It's a wizened look was on her grandfather's face, like as if he was in pain. She'd never forgive herself for being the cause of him not having a starched shirt of a Sunday, and blacked brogues, and grey wool stockings, and corduroy breeches with brass buttons on them, and his freize tail coat, and his three-quarter felt hat that always looked decent though it was old itself. He'd look well in anything, and he shaved; but he was a picture in his Sunday clothes, even when there was a track of mud up his back to the brim of his hat, from the way he stepped on his heels. And his ounce of tobacco a week! He'd die if he was parted from that, And Betsy 'd be there

to see to him when she was gone. But the starched shirt 'd be her own care as long as she lived. She could run over with it of a Saturday night. No one else 'd ever be able to make the standing collar last as long as the shirt. What was she feeling so miserable for? It's often and often she heard of a girl marrying a man without caring a pin for him, and loving him after. Maybe when all the nonsense was knocked out of her, she could even do that.

She wiped away her tears as she walked towards the stile, giving on the bawn at the end of the house. There was a wobble in her feet like as if there was a weakness on her. It was no use for the blackbirds to be telling her she was wrong. . . . She stood for a moment to steady herself. She'd crush them fancies out of her. And put a smile on her face, too. People used to go to their death like that, and the heart dead in them. There. They'd seen her.

"I'm going out with you, grandfather."

"Why wouldn't you. But it's rolled about you'll be. There's a swell on."

"Rolled inside out I'd like to be," she laughed.

If only they wouldn't look at her so sharp. It's near being sick she felt this minute, but the smell of the sea 'd wear that off. And the both of them 'd spare her any foolish talk, though they saw the signs of the tears on her itself.

She helped them to make ready the boat, which they had turned over on its side.

"What's keeping Tom with the help?" her grandfather asked fretfully, after a long silence.

His words grated on her, like as if the boat in full sail had bumped on a rock,

"Is there any way at all of meeting the old devil?" she asked, with a catch in her breath, stooping to disentangle a net.

"God'll provide. God'll provide. Did I ever tell you, Ann, the story of how Maeve took a lover from the sea?"

"You did not. And I don't want to be hearing about any more lovers to-day. It's not much I'm believing in them, and that's the truth."

"I'm after telling him he can have near sixty pounds from me. Luke might take that much when he cools."

"There's not the least use, Maurice, and it all you have, too. Where 'd the other hundred come from?"

"From God." Maurice laughed. "Tom might get it for a fortune."

"And Joe Dunne fighting shy of the place, with the debt that's on it! Anyway, the most he'd ever give with Betsy is twenty-five pounds, with, maybe, a calf or a pig thrown in. And it's a long night he'd spend to pull it down to twenty or less."

"And you always talking about love, grandfather! Between pigs and money it's little account is taken of the poor girls."

"Your grandmother hadn't a penny. It's often and often I think I see her, and you going through a gap or the like. You have her hair and her eyes. But it's her way you have of carrying yourself that shakes me most. . . . Made of love she was."

Maurice bent over a net. Ann followed her grandfather's eyes to Duncorrig rock. It was there she was took, the currach that they had then upsetting, and she alone in it, cutting weed

for kelp. Love was a great thing surely. Near thirty year since the sea closed over her, and that look came on him still !

“ It’s how the whole place must talk of her to you ? ” she said in a hushed voice.

“ It does then.”

If she couldn’t have love herself, it’d be a grand thing to help to keep the memory of it alive in another. It was the sort of look was always in his eyes, just as if he was seeing things. . . . They had sat on the hob, maybe, of a winter night, or on stools outside the door in the fine weather, and to this day he saw her there. . . . And courted under the crab tree ! She couldn’t let him be parted from it all.

“ Don’t you ever marry anyone except you love him, Ann. It’s the only firm rock in this world. There, they’re all in. Straighten the boat, Maurice. Here’s Tom at last, and only Joe Dunne with him. But we’ll manage.”

She held on to the boat for support. There was that great fear on her again. . . . But, she’d do it in spite of herself. Not that Joe looked as if he wanted her, with that scowl on him. And Tom was in no better fettle. Maybe, it’s to refuse her Joe did. Thank God, she could breathe easier, with that hope on her.

“ You’re welcome, Joe. It’s the ready neighbour you are. Yourself and myself on this side, and Maurice and Tom on the other. Ann ’ll lay the rollers.”

Sweat poured from their faces and there was little pause in the motion of the boat. She picked up and laid the rollers, with the certainty that came to her by long practice. It was a great game,

running from bow to stern and back again, and having the roller laid in time. What matter if her hair was falling down itself!

"It's a great worker a man 'll be getting in her as well as everything else."

She smiled at her grandfather as she passed. . . . There was that hungry look in Joe's eyes again.

"Blast Luke Finnegan and his damn cheek."

She let the roller drop askew, half frightened by Joe's shout. She stooped to fix it, but her grandfather's voice stopped her:

"We're far enough. The tide 'll come to here before we're ready. You heard what Luke came about to-day then, Joe?"

"Damn him."

If he only looked at her like that always, just as if he wanted to eat her, she might grow to care for him. Anger became him. She wouldn't mind him kissing her now, just to try how it felt. And he moved her in some queer way. Not a trace of hardness in his look either. But there! he was changing already.

"I heard it. Tom wanted me to give a hundred and sixty pounds with Betsy. Did anyone ever hear the like?"

"It'd be only a hundred—I could find the rest," Maurice said with a contemptuous shrug.

"Listen to that," Tom shouted, his scowl giving way to an eager hopefulness. "And I never thinking you could save a penny, Uncle Maurice."

"It makes it less. But it's a great deal. It's the fine place I could put Betsy into for fifty."

There was all the old struggle in his face now. Afraid to look at her even. It's the queer mixture the man was.

“I won’t have huckstering over a marriage,” Pat Logan said angrily. “Betsy is a far sight too good for Tom, without a penny at all. We’re beholden to you, Joe, for your help with the boat. For the rest we can fend for ourselves.”

“If that doesn’t beat the devil,” Tom shouted. “Don’t go, Joe. Remember the other thing I told you of.”

“I mind it quite well.”

He looked at Ann and wavered: “But it’s too much.”

She felt intense relief. Thank God, there was an end to it all.

She looked at her grandfather leaning over the bow of the boat, his eyes bent wistfully on the low thatched roof beyond the poplar trees.

She grew suddenly angry. . . . She didn’t care if it dragged her through hell, she’d do it. At twenty-five pounds Joe valued her; for he’d give twenty-five with Betsy in any case. She’d make him give seventy-five for her, and more, if she had a mind. How at all did girls draw men to them? She opened her lips to speak, but her tongue refused to move. She might sell herself for a good cause, but she couldn’t deck herself out to rise her price. The shame of thinking of it burned her all over. She’d give anything not to cry: but there were the tears already, turning the men into a blurred mist. If she could only hold herself still, maybe no one’d notice her.

Joe Dunne made a movement to go, stooped down to fasten a loosened shoelace.

“Are you going out yourself to-night, Joe?” the old man asked with a sigh, taking his arms off the boat.

"I am. I don't think I am. I don't well know."

He tugged at his collar, and wet his lips several times with his tongue. She watched him curiously. He looked as if he had a pain on him, or was choking. Why did he keep scowling at her? For all the world he looked like a tree, rooted in the sand, that was trying to free itself and couldn't. If she didn't feel so sore inside her she could laugh, though the tears were running down her cheeks and all. She couldn't help smiling at him anyway: and she'd have to laugh outright in a minute, if he didn't stop making them faces. . . . There was the old Joe Dunne that she had a sort of liking for, coming back again, his eyes burning into her. She shrank back against the boat. Was it going to try and kiss her he was?

"If I give the hundred with Betsy will you marry me, Ann?"

She swayed, holding herself up by the gunwale with her open palms, her eyes shut. . . . It was because the water was breaking in all over her, drowning her, that she saw all her life in a flash: all the heroes of her grandfather's song books; herself praying to be a nun before the high altar in the Convent Chapel at Lismeedy; Luke Finnegan glaring at her through the gaps in his yellow fangs; her grandfather in pauper clothes being carried off in the workhouse van: and down the gold track on the sea her lover racing. . . . But he'd never be in time. The water was buzzing in her ears, and her throat near bursting. And Joe Dunne was throwing her a plank. Didn't he ask her something? To marry him? Like frost it was, and it so cold. She shivered and opened her eyes. There was love in his eyes for sure, and

no hardness now. For once it was her Uncle Maurice that was raving mad, with a threatening look on him as he faced Joe Dunne. And her grandfather in doubt, with a worried frown on him. He'd stop her if she wasn't careful, but she'd save him in spite of himself. Tom, anyway, was in the highest glee. What if she felt like as if she was going into her coffin itself. . . . When her dreams 'd wear away she might rise to loving him.

"I will."

She gasped, as if to take the words back. Like a dead bell they sounded.

"Damnation. The girl isn't for sale," Maurice cried.

"Easy, Uncle Maurice, easy." She swallowed hard. "It's an old thing between Joe and myself."

"As old as first mass to-day?" he sneered.

'Twas the first time he ever spoke to her like that. . . . Oh, God! how it hurt. But she'd lie . . . lie to God himself.

"A person is often timid like, when they're going to take a jump. Can't you understand?" she faltered.

"Too well. May God give you all the help you'll need."

She gave him an appealing look, but he turned on his heel, muttering into his beard.

"Maurice has figaries about marriages," Pat Logan laughed, wringing her hand. "I was afeared myself, for a few minutes, that Joe was trying to force you. But sure if you love him I can die happy. You're certain sure it's your own free choice, Ann?"

"Why wouldn't it be my own choice?" she cried in a choking voice between passionate kisses.

PART II—THE HOLY TREE

FIRST CHAPTER

ANN sat back in her chair and threw on the table the child's dress she had been sewing. . . . She oughn't to be doing it, and there no necessity at all. Though it was queer that God wouldn't let you work of a Sunday, and it likely to keep your mind from worse.

She drummed on the edge of the table with her thimble, a perplexed frown on her face. Father John said it was wrong of her to have this ache on her. Hadn't she tried and tried to rid herself of it, but there it stuck. He spoke grand about duty and the like, but she misdoubted if he knew much about what went on in a woman's heart. After all, what could a priest, and he cutting himself off from love and the like, know about a woman? He threw Saint this and Saint that at her head, but when she read them up after, in the penny lives, it's foolish entirely they were about women. Crossed in love many of 'em must have been, they were so ate up with their own bitterness. And he made out that God 'd be vexed with her, and the Blessed Virgin too. But it was some inkling of what a woman felt God had, and all He wrote in the Bible about them. And it wasn't likely the Blessed Virgin 'd be a curmudgeon, and herself having everything a woman could desire, the whole heavens and the whole earth in her bosom. And they weren't vexed with her she knew; for

it was from one or other of them, all the help she had, came. When the whole world was a black fog the Blessed Virgin's cloak was like a bright light in it: and the hope she proffered in her smile was drink to a thirsty heart. And it was God Himself gave her the beech woods in the autumn, and the sun on everything of a summer morning. . . . Millions and millions of things so that she couldn't open her eyes, or turn her head, but the heart was moved in her. If they couldn't take away the pang that was in her itself, they eased it. . . .

Father John meant well, no doubt, and was a help to many, but it's little good he did for her. The things he promised her that never came to pass! How long ago was it? Ages and ages it seemed. How long the days took to go by, and the nights longer.

Her eyes strayed to the four-poster wooden bed in the corner. She'd tear them curtains off it, and they often near stifling her in the night, and she lying there awake, and Joe snoring. . . . She liked him too, in a way. He was straight in his dealings and fond of the child. And at times, at first, when he took her in his arms, he used to nearly make her forget. Not that she liked him any the more, but from some passing weakness in her nature. All the time the best in her was agin him. And instead of liking him better with time, it's colder and colder she grew, as if the heart grew stiff in her. . . . She never could get over the feeling that she was one of them girls in the streets of a big town that sold themselves for money, and that Joe was the man that had bought her. . . .

Four years ago last May it was, and it August

now, and another harvest on top of them. The nineteenth, no, the twenty-first it was. Four years and a quarter to a day, since she married him. Her Uncle Maurice was the only one that said she'd rue it. And she not seeing a sight of him since. . . . Yokohama was the last place he wrote from, saying he might be in on them at the heels of the letter, and it months ago now, and never a sight of him yet. . . .

She'd do the same again, and it giving so much joy to her grandfather. Though, maybe, she mightn't, if she knew in time that Luke couldn't take the land off them. Only the gear. And Maurice's sixty pounds 'd set them up in that again. But how could she take back her promise anyhow, and it given to Joe ?

Muddled in her head she was, as well as in her heart ! A bold front she put on it, however, muddled and all though she might be ; and her grandfather never as much as suspecting anything from that day to this. And she wearing the same face to the whole world, except to Father John in the confessional. The best of advice he gave her no doubt, and marriage eternal in this world and the next. But he read her wrong for all that. She prayed and fasted and did penance till the bones ached in her, but no good came of it. First he promised that it'd be alright when he'd read over them in the chapel. But the feeling she had, when the ring was put on her, was like being tied up to a post for life. Then it was the marriage bed that was to bring love to her. Father John had it all pat ; but it was empty words they were, no matter how he gilded them with his saint's voice. It only made her worse. Heaven was held

open for her, and she was filled with the desire of it, only to be left cold and naked, shivering at a shut gate. . . . When Joe held her, her longing was for someone else that 'd move her spirit as well as her flesh. . . . Then it was the child that 'd make everything right between them. But, in all her joy of it, the child didn't make Joe any less like a stranger to her. It's more like a child of her dreams little Bessie was than a child of his.

Father John said it was the devil that put them thoughts in her head, and gave her the feeling she had. But Father John was too lavish entirely with the devil. It was God that made her after all; and in every nerve of her body and her mind He had planted a warning agin Joe. If only she could make out where God ended and the devil began? It was like as if they played hurley with her, tossing her about with their sticks, and she feeling the hurt of it all. . . . The child was a help surely. It took her out of herself for a minute, or maybe an hour, and she holding it to her breast, and losing herself in its eyes; just as the sun made her forget, or a tree agin the sunset. But, mostly, her life was hell. A clean, orderly sort of hell, with a coat of whitewash on the walls every year, and the clock ticking out seconds as long as eternity, one duller than the other. . . .

She used to try to get up a talk of a night at first, racking her brain for the tales her grandfather used to tell, and trying to make a joke or the like; but it's like mummies Joe and his Aunt Peggy used to sit, one on each side of the hob. And the sigh of relief they'd give, when they could get back on the price of eggs and fish, or the yield of this field or that. And the talk, always, of the waste

of eggs in the house, and milk. And hardly enough of that kept back from the creamery, to feed the child with, after it was weaned. . . .

In the end they struck her dumb. Not but she made an effort on the prices and the crops, before she gave in; but that was even worse than her stories. They'd look at other, and shake their heads, and, maybe, cut her short; and Joe 'd start again: "As you were saying, Aunt Peggy." Not but what they were kind enough in their own way. And when she was sick they tended her just as careful as they would a sick cow.

She was like a hired girl through the day, her work cut out for her; and, in the evening, she was as little regarded as one of the wooden noggins on the dresser; laid by till it was wanted again, unless Joe wanted to take his pleasure out of her. . . . But she wasn't going to have that again. . . .

Her features worked spasmodically, and she swallowed hard to prevent herself from crying. A son to work the farm he wanted; or, maybe, two. . . . Father John might advise her till he was black in the face, and Aunt Peggy throw out hints, and Joe bully her, but she wouldn't. She didn't care if that was what marriage was for itself. . . . They were all wrong. She could feel it in her, and see it as plain as print before her eyes. She was in such a maze and a flurry them first months, doubting even whether there wasn't love in it, that she couldn't be held to account. But there 'd be no excuse for her now, and she knowing. Father John didn't know how a woman felt them times, and no love in her, only loathing. . . . anyway, how she felt. . . . It wasn't the devil tempting her, it was God telling her. If there was any

sin in the world it was in doing what she felt 'd soil her, what her soul shrank back from, till she was as hard and as dry as a wizened pea. . . .

But there was the sun shining in on her. . . . And there 'd be the sun every day till death took her. She only twenty-five; and her heart, this minute, feeling like a bud that was on the point of opening. Maybe, to wither up it would, without ever opening?

She jumped to her feet and wiped her eyes. It was only pitying herself she was. Anyhow, she had a mahogany table, and a painted deal cupboard, and a cloak that was finer than her mother's! She laughed hysterically. What was it Maurice said? To keep a stiff upper lip. It was down a long road she'd have to keep it. Fifty years, maybe, before them both. And, long before that, she'd freeze into a mask like his Aunt Peggy. What was behind that sort of fixed sneer on Peggy's lips, it was hard to tell. It might be only her high teeth. All the same, it gave you the feeling that she could enjoy your trouble. . . . Year in and year out she'd have Peggy's eyes following her, reading into her heart, maybe, and Joe growing harder and harder. But, there 'd always be Bessie.

Her smile was arrested by a sudden fear. God couldn't give her this last blow. She shivered; waving her hand as if to ward it off. He wouldn't let them teach the child to grow up like themselves!

She ran to the door, wrenched it open and gave a scared look around the kitchen. Thank God, the child was safe enough, having its sleep out in the corner of the settle. And Peggy had a soft look in her eyes for once, watching Bessie from the seat

by the window. Maybe she wronged the woman. She half giggled in her nervousness :

“ It’s across to see my grandfather I’m thinking of going.”

“ There’s the machine to get ready for tomorrow ! And Joe doesn’t like you to be gadding about.”

Like an old witch she looked, bending again over her newspaper, with her shiny, straight black hair, her brown face and long sharp nose, the black eyes of her, and her pointed chin. And the sort of glint she shot out of the corner of an eye, as if she hated her.

“ Everything is ready for the threshing. And I’ll be back in time to milk the cows.”

“ You’re going, are you ! And your husband wanting you to stick at home like a decent married woman. Who’ll mind Joe’s child if I might ask ? ”

“ Joe’s child ! I’ll mind my own child.” Her anger rose. “ There’s a dance at Duggan’s Cross, and I’ll go to that too. My sprigged cotton I’ll wear ; and the straw hat, with the cherries on it that I put by four years back.”

“ It’s often I told Joe to beat the high figaries out of you. And, mark my words, he will one day. It’s often I seen the bad spark in you ; and, more than once, I told him it’d break out in you unless he sobered you.”

“ I wish he had that much spunk in him. No doubt ye did yeer best to quench any fire that was in me ; but, thank God, it’s flaring up in me again it is. All the Dunnes that ever lived couldn’t put it out in me now.”

“ It’s always I knew you had no sense in you. To go out without your hood cloak on you, and you

five and twenty ! and to go to a dance at a cross-roads ! ‘ Watch out for the Logan strain in her,’ I often said to Joe, ‘ and stamp on it.’ But to have all that of madness in you ! A Dunne never dreamt of doing the like ; and there this and that to do about the house of a Sunday evening.”

“ A Dunne never dreamt of anything—that’s my misfortune. And their own too, the poor things. There’s the child waking up.”

She rushed to the settle, snatched up the child and hugged it :

“ It’s to dream and dream you will, Bessie. And ride a cockhorse up to the stars, and be as happy as the day is long. And you’ll take your mammy with you, and not be throwing mud on her every time you talk of her.”

“ Mud, mud, mud,” Bessie chortled.

“ It’s a spancel to their tongue some people ’d want,” Peggy grunted.

“ What for ? and the air of the house always weighing on me like lead. But we won’t feel it to-day, will we, Bessie ? We’ll dance and we’ll sing, and pick flowers, and smell the sea.”

“ And paddle ? ” the child shouted, open-eyed.

“ Paddle ? why, of course. And I’ll put on your new frock. You can wet it in the sea as much as you please.”

Bessie clapped her hands and struggled to the ground. “ Auntie, auntie, I can paddle in my new frock. Where’s my new frock ? Put on my new frock.”

“ Mad, mad. ‘ As mad as a Logan.’ Sure it’s often I heard the saying. I pray to my God that the child has escaped that curse. Thank the Lord, they’re bowling to Duggan’s Cross to-day,

and Joe'll be there. It's the nice look he'll give you, my lady."

"He'll see me alive, anyway : a sight he hasn't seen for many a day. Come along, Bessie, and I'll dress you."

She ran a race with the child to the room, and sang as she dressed her. Like the grass in the spring she felt, fresh and young again after a hard winter. It was the fear of being sunk under entirely, that gave her a new heart. They talked of her, did they ? Well, she'd let them see. And it was only a few minutes ago that there wasn't a stime of light anywhere. She hadn't danced since her wedding, and it's a poor heart she had for it then ; and none at all since, and her feelings near dead within her.

But she wouldn't think of that now. She'd wear the coral necklace Maurice sent her from Naples ; and it lying in her box, without her looking at it, from the day she got it, three years ago. There 'd be Terry MacGann with the bagpipes ; and, maybe, Felix Doherty with the fiddle. She'd dance the hornpipe for them, on Duggan's half-door, agin any man in the parish. She wasn't going to live like the dead any longer, and the youth springing up in her like flowers spearing through the earth after rain. And she'd dance next Sunday again, and the Sundays after, as long as the weather 'd hold. And she'd take her turn at the threshings. There 'd be their own to-morrow. She'd clear the barn for a few steps after it.

She hadn't felt such a tingle on her for many a day. Leaning over the gunwale, of a night, she used to have it, and she watching for the dawn. And, as the light grew, a sort of unfolding used to

go on in her, like the opening of a flower in the sun.

“How do you like me, Aunt Peggy?” she said, with a gay laugh, as she led Bessie through the kitchen.

“Joe’ll soon put a stop to your gallop. Anyway, leave the child at home with me, and don’t be bringing her up bad.”

“Run, Mammy, run,” Bessie cried, frightened by the Aunt’s scowl.

Ann laughed as she ran after the child :

“That’s it, Bessie. If they look cross at us, and want to keep us at home, we’ll run away from them. Over the river we’ll go to the blue mountains and sleep under the stars and ate——”

“Blackberries, blackberries,” the child shouted, clapping her hands. “Three—seven—two.”

“Well, one, maybe. This big ripe one. Think of the pains in our little bellies.”

“’Nother one. ’Nother one.”

The child forgot the blackberries in the pursuit of a butterfly ; and the butterfly to gather a posy for her great-grandfather. Ann’s face glowed. It’s quicksilver a child was, hopping about like a flea. But a comfort for all that. The lonely colour had gone out of everything ; and the bloom of the sloes and the blackberries laughed at her. Even the stubble had a fresh face on it, gold and green with the young clover. There was a bird, too, to cheer her up ; though it’s tired of love-making most of them were when it came to the heat of August. But they’d make up for it in the Spring.

“Well, well. It’s a picture you’re looking, Ann.”

She waved to her grandfather, who was leaning over the gate of the bawn, a pipe in one hand, a blackthorn stick in the other.

“And why wouldn't I? Sure it's you're looking grand, yourself.”

“There. Let Bessie run in to them two imps of the devil, God bless them, of Betsy's. Grand flowers they are entirely, Bessie, girleen. It's in my buttonhole I'll put 'em. This is a fairy coat I wear of a Sunday. Put your hand in the tail pocket of it. What did I tell you? There now, run in and share your grand ha'porth with the twins. . . . And Betsy on her way to another, too!”

He watched the child run to the kitchen door:

“And why wouldn't Betsy? Sure it's to miss you more I would, Ann, only for them childre. There isn't much signs of you doing the like? But it's grand entirely you're looking all the same: like a blossom in the sun of a morning, and the dew not dried off it. And I having a queer feeling on me for some time past that you were settling down.”

“Is it me? I'm as frisky as a young lamb. If I wasn't going to take you to the dance at Duggan's Cross, it's up to the top of Knockbrack we'd go. And you'd tell me about Maeve and Graine and Deirdre, and all the great lovers that ever were.”

“It's the great news entirely, to hear of you going to a dance again. It's not of the unhappy lovers I'll tell you, but of the happy ones, and you looking so happy yourself. It's a hard crust Joe Dunne shows to the outer world, but sure he must turn a softer side of himself to you. Maybe the

dance 'd be merrier than the climb to Knockbrack, and the back bent on me with the rheumatics? The music and the sight of young people footing it 'll warm up the sap in me."

She wasn't going to let that sinking feeling master her any more. . . .

"Old, indeed! And your heart younger than my own. You could step a reel as well as the best of them."

"I'll be on fire to do it, true enough. But it'll be sitting in a chair of Sally Roche's—if she can spare me one. The legs can't always do what the spirit bids 'em. But sure I had my day, and a great day it was. Answer your heart always, Ann. Will you be coming in to see your mother now, or after we come back?"

"I could hardly escape her now, and Bessie gone in and all. What sort of weather is it with her?"

"She's reading the *Lismeedy News* behind the house, so you needn't fear. Stormy to fair it is. But any reminder about Luke Finnegan has a bad effect on her. Betsy is going to give her own care a dip in the sea, and she'll be glad to take Bessie along with her. Let us steal off and give them all a surprise. It's the fine woman Betsy is, God bless her, the way she turned Tom into the makings of a man and keeps your mother in order."

Ann struggled anew against a dreary feeling. . . . The same temptation had come to her before, when she heard of Luke's death: regret that she hadn't married him. . . . She'd be free now! A shudder ran through her. Thinking of what she had escaped, she ought to be. Yet, when she turned from that, the horror of what she had

ran into, faced her. As if she was clinging to a plank in a raging sea, with the choice of being swallowed down by the water or dashed on to the rocks. But that was all nonsense. She was only reading back from her feelings now. She made her choice of what looked a safe harbour enough. The mistake she made was in marrying a man she didn't love. . . . There was little differ in the pain they'd give you, whether it was a fairly decent man like Joe or a skunk like Luke. There she was again, going back over the old ground. The past was past. And, somehow, the pain didn't stick long on her to-day. She'd fling it all off with the dance. It was near gone even now.

Her grandfather stealing off from Betsy, who thought the world and all of him, would make a cat laugh. Or make you cry with love of him, he was that like a naughty child. Smiling, as if he never had a heart-scald in his life, and he near bent double with the rheumatism. It's ashamed she ought to be to have a dark minute, and the blood singing in her. There was such a joy in the lifting of her limbs, that she felt as light and as free as the air.

SECOND CHAPTER

At Liam Sullivan's gate Pat Logan made a trumpet of his hand, nodded, and quickened his pace.

"I hear it, too," Ann said, with a heightened flush. "'The Wind that shakes the Barley' it is. Terry always starts 'em on that. You'll be the lighter for taking off your coat. There. Let me carry it for you. And don't overdo yourself with the eagerness. We'll be there time enough."

She had to hold herself in, to keep even with the old man. Not much though, for it's fine he was stepping it, and the years that were on him. Would she have that fire in her, and she his age? Not but she felt like living to be a thousand year, with the sound of music in her blood.

"It used to worry me of a night why you gave up the dancing, Ann?"

"It was one of them queer fits, without head or tail to them, that sometimes comes on a person. But it's over now."

"Thanks be to God for that. It was the marriage no doubt. Some take their happiness in the throng, and others in the quiet. Your grandmother and myself could do both. After dancing a score of couples down, it's often in the summer, we used to roam Knockbrack as long as there was light on it; and, if there was a moon, far into the night."

It all reminded her of a far-off old dream she used to have . . . had now, in a way, with music

floating in the air, and the sound of laughter. The winding lane led up to it. It was peeping out at her from behind the golden stacks in Thady Duggan's haggard . . . shimmering on the beech trees at the cross . . . whispering from the green sea down by Duncorrig and it giving bursts of white laughter as it dashed agin the rocks . . . in her heart, too, so that she was afeared to speak for fear of breaking the spell. . . .

If he'd only go on talking of her grandmother ! But he wouldn't. He was in a dream, too.

"Ye used to see things ?" she ventured.

"Aye, aye. The beauty of this world and the next. It was like as if Tir na n'og and heaven were rolled into one. To this day, I couldn't swear whether I saw it all in her eyes, or not. The gates of heaven opened once, and God and the Blessed Virgin and Our Lord Himself floated out, a big crowd of saints behind 'em, and angels blowing away, for all their might, on gold bugles. And they all looking gay and merry. Then, the big rock at the north side of Knockbrack rolled aside ; and out trooped Oisin, and Cuchulain himself, and Maeve, and Diarmuid and Graine, and Fionn, and many a pair of noble lovers, whose names I never heard tell of. Up from the sea came all the gods and goddesses and heroes from foreign lands, laughing and joking and making love, the beauty of many of them fair taking the light out of my eyes ; Venus and Apollo and the like, that you often heard me talk about. And out from under the bracken, and from every tuft of heather came crowds of Good People, up to all sorts of pranks. From what I often heard tell, from Father John, and others before him, it's to think that they

wouldn't all mix well you would. But, it's as pleasant as a Pattern it all was. The Holy Ghost, all the time, floating overhead, like a white cloud in the shape of a dove, breathing down peace on the whole of them. I give you my word that the Blessed Virgin herself footed a reel with the purtiest of them pagans. God looking on all the while, with a smile on Him. . . . It's much they all made of the both of us. And no wonder; for it's Lizzie was the equal of any of 'em for looks. And, sure, they said it was the love that was in our hearts, made kings and queens and saints of us, and gave us the freedom of the earth and of heaven."

"It's the holy thing surely. How did it all finish up?"

"There was a great blare of trumpets, speaking in a voice as plain as I'm talking to you in now: 'Love is the beginning and the end. Love is life and God and heaven and the beauty of the earth.' With that, there we were, lying on a heather bank, Lizzie cuddled up on my arm, and the stars blinking down on us."

There was a mist, shot with gold, before her eyes. The hedges moved like a procession of great lovers. Her bosom heaved to heavenly music. The air was honey on her lips.

"Your grandmother was the wonder of the world."

He was walking straighter, and hit the road as firm as a young man. There was youth in his voice, and music; and a light in his eyes, as proud and soft as a June evening. Love did all that for him after more than thirty year . . . gave him heaven while he had her, and something like heaven now in the memory of her. . . .

Her breath came short. After thirty year, forty maybe, or maybe more, she'd be stumbling along a lonely white road that led to nowhere; her heart and her memory as empty as a grave from which her dreams had faded away.

"Hurry, Ann. Hurry. Give me my coat. They're just finishing this dance. You'll be in time for the next."

With trembling hands she helped him into his coat.

"For what did the likes of me come to such a place at all?"

But already the answer to her half querulous words was in her eyes, bright with anticipation, eagerly scanning the groups under the beech trees. . . . They were all so happy looking: Susy Canavan and Julia Delahunty and Bid Sullivan and Nora Tracey. There must be two score of them at least—and a lock of married women thrown in. And still more men. They must have come from far and wide, there was so many she didn't know. That red-haired girl of the Farrells from beyond Knockbrack, and a couple of mountainy men. The young fellows in town clothes must be shopboys from Lismeedy; or more likely from Ballyclough, and she never setting eyes on 'em before. And the clean-shaved man, with the olive skin, like her Uncle Maurice's? His clothes were rougher than the shopboys', but they sat better on him; and he had a travelled look. With the Kerrigans he came, no doubt, and he talking to the two girls. They needn't be so stuck-up over their covered car, and they needing it to hide their plainness, the poor things. A stranger he must be. Maybe, it's to one of the girls he was promised, and they so taken up with him.

“ I’m blessed if it isn’t Pat Logan ! ”

“ And Ann Dunne ? ”

“ Sure we thought it was dead you were, Ann, and we never seeing you at the Cross.”

“ Rozen your bow, Felix Doherty. Sure it’s to fly away from the bagpipes Ann will.”

Flushed with happiness and a great shyness, she shook hands and returned greetings. It felt like wine in her, only more heartsome, to see all their bright faces. The Cross itself was laughing a welcome : bars of gold dancing on the sward under the trees, and up and down the stems. Wasn’t she the fool ever to give up the dance, when the very sight of them, sitting and moving about, gave her such a feel ? No, she wouldn’t dance yet. She’d sit still, beside her grandfather, and drink her fill of it first with her eyes.

“ You wouldn’t have a chair idle for my grandfather, Sally Roche ? ’Tisn’t much goodwill there is between the grass, and it dry even, and his rheumatism.”

“ Is it for Pat Logan ? By the luck of the world, I have then. And, if I hadn’t itself, it’s to steal one from another I would, and it for him. Though it’ll come hard on him to sit still in it, and he seeing the feet moving.”

She stood at the back of her grandfather’s chair in a half dream. Like young birches they were, all a-glitter, having a game with the shadows of the beeches, Terry MacGann urging them on at the top of his might. It wasn’t an eight-handed reel at all it was, but a frolic of the good people ; the sun playing all sorts of tricks on them : kissing their hair, or a buckle at their waist, or the hem of their dress, like one of them mad lovers in a song.

It made the Farrell girl's hair like a fire you'd see in the night, with that in it that 'd drag you to it whether you would or no.

"It's little loss there is on this generation," Pat Logan exclaimed. "That young fellow in front of Tim Kerrigan's daughter has the light step. Is it the way I don't know him, or are the eyes failing me?"

Another of the vague figures took shape for Ann: "I noticed him before. It's a stranger he is."

She continued to look at him . . . the sort of smile he had that made him different from the rest . . . something you'd like.

"It's a cousin of the Kerrigans he is, from beyond the mountains," the piper broke in. "By the way of gathering up old songs and tunes he is. Not but I admit that he can play the fiddle better than Felix Doherty—if that's saying much."

The blind fiddler tossed his head: "And the whole world knowing that it's gathering the young men into a movement for lifting the country to its ancient grandeur, he is."

MacGann drowned the fiddler's loud voice in a vicious drone of the pipes:

"Do you think, you blind idiot you, that it's deaf Pat Logan is? If the whole world knows what he's here for itself, is there any cause for telling the peelers? And two of them across at Thady Duggan's front door?"

"A brass band couldn't tell *them* anything at this hour," Doherty chuckled. "Thady is the good hand at that. Treble X he wastes on 'em. Signs on it, they'd take a gate post for a bonafide, or for yourself, Terry, and you living next door."

"If they're as bonafide as all that, I don't mind

if you scrape the next figure while I'm taking a rest. Only don't you dance a step till I come back, Ann. Felix hasn't the fire in his fingers for you. It's to limp through you'd have to."

"I'll tire ye both down before I'm done," Ann laughed.

It was so like old times. . . . All the feel of it was coming back. Soon, Terry 'd bring a pint across to Felix, under the very eyes of the peelers. . . . And they'd take turn and turn about when she wound up the day on Thady's half door. Did she remember all the steps? But sure she could trust to her blood to remember them. She knew from the first that there was something in that young man. If it was gathering old songs he was he'd be likely to track out her grandfather. And if he had a plan up his sleeve to give a lift to Ireland her grandfather 'd think no worse of him for it.

Terry MacGann ended with a flourish. The circle round the dancers broke up. Ann was joined by a group of excited girls.

"Have you seen him yet, Ann?"

"Yerra, what does Ann care, and she a married woman."

"He's stand-off enough, they say, with the girls. Maybe it's shy he is. Though it's the devil and all for courage he is when he's rousing the boys."

"Whist, can't ye. And that a secret."

"There's Nance Farrell making up to him. Give me a red head of hair for impudence. She thinks she can set any man on fire with it. But the Kerrigans won't yield Brian Hogan easy."

Felix Doherty began to tune his fiddle. Ann's speculation as to what sort of movement Brian was organising was cut short. The girls screamed

and rushed off to find partners. Ann unpinned her hat and flung it on her grandfather's lap. Like a hound, at the sight of a hare, she felt ; all eager, and a-tremble for the start. . . . There was no staying power in them shop boys. But the mountainy men were as hard and stringy as an old holly bush, and were like rubber balls on their feet. She felt like a half solid ball herself this minute, that 'd fly up through the trees at the first hop. . . . She'd ask the lanky man, that looked so lonely, with nobody asking him through not knowing him likely, and he a dancer from the cut of him.

"It was the red headed girl I had my eye on, but you'll do," he said, in gloomy assent.

"What differ 'd make to dance with a broomstick if it was a lively stepper ? "

"I don't know about all that. It's between me and the light she has got somehow."

"If you show off with me, it's plenty of eyes she might have for you when we're done. Anyway, I'll get you to know her."

"The devil you will ! I'm damned if I don't knock fire out of the road in front of you, for a decent girl."

With all her dreams of a man, she never felt like that about anyone she saw in the flesh. She liked the look of one man, and the talk of another . . . many and many of them. Because they answered to her step and kept time with her, or had courage or the like, or were kind. She was liking the whole world this minute. The mountainy man could dance, but he hadn't an eye in his head for anyone except Nance Farrell. It was queer how men were took mad like that ; but she liked him for it. She'd like everyone in the world to be in love.

Though she had missed it herself she didn't want to be a spoil sport. Faster and faster she wanted the fiddle to go. There was no weight in her body. Like one of them sunbeams frisking through the leaves she was. The trees themselves were dancing. It was like as if she was flying in the air, all made of music and laughing.

"That was something like," she panted, as the figure ended.

"I caught her eye on me twice," her partner said with glee.

"You can ketch her hand in the next figure."

"By chokey, I can," he said, with a breathless, wondering stare.

In the other figures his voice floated across Ann's dreams: "I squeezed her hand . . . four sets of people dancing—sixteen girls in all—and not one of 'em a patch on her. . . . She squeezed me back . . . she's going to dance all the evening with me."

His words coloured her thoughts in some queer way. A great longing for love was on her again. Not that she could ever have it now, and she married. But she could play with the thought like. The dance wasn't enough. It brought grand feelings to her, and a joy that was past telling; but she wanted more. It wasn't to get love so much she wanted, as to give it. Maybe if it was the right kind, she'd like to get it too. But that had never been proffered her. It was many and many a one said he loved her. But, except in a dream, no one ever tapped the flood that was pressing up in her heart. Joe Dunne loved her in his own way, only it wasn't her way. Some day it might come to her, as it did to the mountainy man,

in the flash of a red head or the like. And then? She sighed at a glimpse of the sea beyond Dun-corríg. . . . Well, then, she'd have to put it from her. Father John was strong on that.

"There, that's done," her partner, stamping the ground violently through the last bar, said with a sigh of relief. "Thank you, thank you, young woman, for giving me my chance."

She watched him rush off to Nance Farrell. In half a minute he had her out of the crowd. And there they were off together, in the direction of the wood. Father John was agin that, too. . . . It's what she'd like in a man, to be whipt off her feet in a second, before she'd know where she was. Or, maybe, it grew up in you like a river, beginning in a weeny little stream, gathering another streameen here and there, till, at last, it came to the bar in a mighty flood, and was swallowed up in the fathomless depths of the sea. But it's little power Father John 'd have over it then, or yourself, for that matter. Well, she wished the moun-tainy man luck; though it's seldom she was so disregarded by a man in her life!

Her eyes wandered over the little groups of men and women. The Kerrigan girls were talking to two shop boys. Where was the young man that came with them? She remembered now that she hadn't seen him in the dance at all, and she thinking of him once or twice. Brian Hogan his name was. If she wasn't Dunne now, it'd make a sort of rhyme with her real name. That was a bitter pun enough, without her meaning it. What was the crowd so thick about her grandfather for? The young man wasn't anywhere, as far as she could see, unless he was within in Thady Duggan's,

though he didn't look the likes of that. It's them peelers were the lads for turning an eye the other way, and they sloping down the road as if it was only ghosts was going in and out the backway of the pub. There was Terry MacGann screening Felix's pint, as if it tempted him. Though it's enough he had in him already, to judge by his sober gait. They wouldn't be starting again for sometime yet. The sight of Felix blowing off the froth 'd be too much for Terry, and he'd go back and have another pint.

She didn't want to talk to anyone; only just to look at things and enjoy them. Like you would, and you beginning to feel well again, after a bad sickness. There! the crowd was thinning from round her grandfather. And, if that wasn't the young man, sitting in the grass at his feet, writing away in a little bookeen, for the dear life.

"Could you whistle that last bar again for me, Mr. Logan?"

Somehow, she knew he'd have a voice like that.

"It's 'The Races of Knockanimma,' Ann. The young man says there's no record of the tune in the song books. That it's an old air someone must have put words to, in my father's time. Sing it to him, you. My breath isn't what it was."

It's the good manners he had, standing up and all, and he near as shy as herself.

"Mrs. Dunne, her name is. My granddaughter, Ann Logan, that was."

"Brian Hogan is my name."

Was he smiling that way because the same thought struck him that struck her a while ago? Eyes he had, that matched his face. Like her

own, by the same token. He was a young man you'd have the will to do things for.

"Sure I will. But it's a disgrace the words are to the air. Wouldn't you rather I hummed it to you?"

"Much."

Though he fired the word at her short, the look of interest that went before it, made her think she could make a friend of him. It was like talking to a person she knew for a long time, with great understanding on him.

She hummed the air from the beginning. It was in order to pick up the notes, of course, that he kept his eyes fixed on her so intent, a sort of wonder in the depths of them, as if he was brooding over the tune. She'd almost say it was a dream he was in. She was glad he could be moved that way. It's the same effect the music had on her—to lift her out of herself. Though he gave a sigh itself, as if he was waking up, no doubt he heard alright, and he even correcting a note. He was smiling all over now, with the eagerness of a boy. About thirty he was.

"If I live to be a hundred I'll not come across anything better than that. And you gave it's own grey colour back to it, Mrs. Dunne."

How could he see that, and she only humming it? But she had seen it right enough: the grey, wind-swept plain in winter, with the first gleam of the sun coming through the sleet.

"It's a shame to put jockies' caps on a tune like that. I must put words to it myself."

She knew he was the right sort that could be vexed by wrong words to a tune.

"You could write a song yourself?" she cried.

"This minute I feel I could. But, to-morrow I'll know I can't," he said with a boyish laugh.

That was so like herself. Often she had the feel of making a song in her; yet, when she tried, she couldn't make one word follow another, but they'd be as lame as the string of spavined horses you'd see at the heel of a tinker's cart.

"I'm sure you could do it if you wanted to," she exclaimed, and then blushed.

It was bold of her to say the like, but the thought came on her, so to say, without thinking. It was how his eyes, or something, gave her a great belief in him.

"Well, maybe, I'll try in earnest one day."

There was a sort of hush in his voice. And, though he was looking straight at her, it was like as if he was seeing some vision beyond her. A poet he was without a doubt. Like the pool near Duncorrig of an evening, his eyes were . . . seeming to hold the world and all in their calm depths; a sort of still soft light in them, and mystery. She'd nearly believe she could see what she was thinking of in them.

"It's many another old air you must have, Mr. Logan? You might have others, as good as Knockanimma that the world has forgot?"

"I might then, only my memory is getting like a sieve. But, when it was in better fettle, Ann, there, had from it whatever it held. We'll ransack her memory for you, and welcome. Will you be hereabouts long?"

"A couple of months—more, maybe."

There was another look in his eyes now. The vision was there still, but the softness had gone. The lines of his face had hardened. She hadn't

noticed the strong set of his jaw before, nor the determined sort of lips he had. The movement he was thinking of now, no doubt. There was command in him. Though you'd follow him even more because you liked him. Like Father John, and he saying the Acts he looked, as if he'd go through fire and water for his faith, a great belief on him. His face was changing again . . . the crinkle of a smile breaking over him, like the sun chasing a cloud off a field of ripening corn with a June wind on it.

"It's a lot of trouble I'll give you, Mrs. Dunne."

"Sorra trouble at all it'll be to Ann, to hum you an old song, or to sing it either. It's the breath of her nostrils they are to her, and her heart so set on them. Tell us more about them Feisanna. There's nothing for stirring up the youth of the country like the songs and the old stories."

She was glad that her grandfather spoke up for her. It'd be too forward of her to say all she felt herself . . . that it wouldn't be a trouble at all, but a great joy. He was like a fresh clean breeze blowing through her. Like an old friend he was. She felt as much at home with him already as she did with her grandfather or her Uncle Maurice.

She listened to his story of a Feis at Ballyclough. He had the Irish, with the same bloss as her grandfather. She'd have to pay more attention to her own. It did her good to see so much fire in a man. And the sense of him. But his seriousness sat light on him, and the next minute he'd be laughing. It was fine, how he could take a joke agin himself. And there wasn't a stime of hate in him for England or an Orangeman. He rooted out an excuse even for Cromwell.

There they were forming for another dance. What did she want with the dance when she could listen to the likes of him? She'd pretend not to hear Terry MacGann, and he calling out to her. There was the mountainy man as happy as a king, and Nance Farrell her face near as red as her hair. It wasn't a lover to dance with, or to roam the woods with, she wanted herself, but just to sit still and listen to Brian Hogan talking. What was he jumping to his feet for?

"There, I've been talking and talking, and you wanting to dance, Mrs. Dunne?"

It was strange that no sooner were the words out of his mouth, but, somehow, she did want to. Just as if it was the natural thing to do, and she eager for it all the time, without her knowing it. No doubt, because he had the build of a good dancer. There was something she could trust in the grip of his hand as he helped her up from the grass. She could see that he had a hold on many of the young men already, the way they looked at him. That was the feeling she had for him herself, a great respect. Even the mountainy man was dragging himself away from Nance Farrell, to bid him the time of day.

"It's down special three of us came to see you," he whispered, as he shook hands.

"At nine o'clock, in Kerrigan's barn. By all appearance you won't find the time long."

"You never said a truer word, and it's many we heard from you. If we only have the luck with the other thing, that I had in finding a wife, I wouldn't call the Pope my aunt. And it's the decent girl beside you I'll thank to my dying day for showing me the right track to Nance. If you

have sense, Brian, you'll hook the likes of her to the cause."

It's serious enough he was looking again. One day, maybe, he'd trust her and tell her all about it. . . . Ireland, that always brought a lump to her throat. And she'd like to help him. It's the hard lives men always lived that worked for Ireland, and the sad end that came to the most of them. And he had a lonely look on him when he was off his guard. It's to mother him, as she did little Bessie and she upset, she felt inclined.

"It's many a way you'd be able to help."

"It's glad I'd be to do anything."

When he spoke that way she'd just do what he asked. It was something in his smile, or in his eyes, or in the tone of his voice. It was the honesty of him shining through everything. A sort of certainty came on her that he'd know what was right, and would do it. It was queer, and she hardly knowing him at all, that she felt as if she knew him in and out: his rightness in the way of looking at things she meant. From the very first look at him there was never a doubt on her mind about him, nor a question. It was as if God made them to be friends. And He made them to the one step, too. It was just as if the other half of herself was opposite to her. It did make a differ, after all, who she danced with. She used to be centred round herself entirely, but now he came into it. It gave a restful feel to everything. Instead of wandering away in the clouds, like she used to, there was his smile to look for. And his hands were cooler than anyone else's in the chain. It gave her the same feeling as all the rest of him: the set of his head on his shoulders, the

way he looked at her—that she could believe in him.

“We have a threshing to-morrow,” she said as they rested for a moment.

“I’ll be there. I’m going to all the threshings.”

She wasn’t thinking of the threshing at all; but, somehow, it came into her head to say it. And it came as no surprise to her that he’d be at it. Peggy ’d be glad enough to give her a turn of the threshings: to give ’em all to her, for that matter, if she didn’t show too plain that she wanted to go.

It was the blessing of God that put it into her head to come to the dance to-day. It was as if the world was widening out before her. It wasn’t in a dream she was any more, for she could feel joy in the earth as her feet struck it. The way he answered back her smile, one’d think he was reading her thoughts: long stretches of uplands, with the wind blowing over them; a wide green track through a wood, the sun playing hide and seek with the shadows, and the leaves talking to her; great open glens; a well under a rock in the shade of a mountain ash.

“Why, it’s not over! I was just going to lie down on a fairy bank and watch red berries in a well.”

“And they’d turn into a prince before your eyes, and you’d walk down a glen to the music of a stream.”

“That’s it. Green water! Singing and laughing down the rocks it’d be. And there ’d be the sea at the end. Don’t forget that. And, all day long, the sun. But sure you know it all?”

It was good to hear the laugh of him and to see his look of understanding. If they both hadn’t

their work to do, it's to walk to the world's end with him she'd like to. But the cows 'd be crying out for her. However, the world could never be black again, with the likes of him in it. There 'd be the threshing to-morrow, and more after. It was a great silence was on him now. But that didn't make him the less friendly; more, if any. She must hurry. There was a fidget on her grandfather, and he having to drive in his own beasts.

"I must be going back to milk the cows."

"And I have my work to do."

The sigh he gave was how she was feeling herself:

"You won't forget that some of it is going to be my work from this hour?"

"I'll forget nothing."

Something in the sound of them, more than in the words themselves, made her happy. It was the work he was going to give her to do for the country, no doubt. Mostly? Partly anyhow. But she couldn't deny that he put a colour on it. 'Twas a wonderful day and to-morrow 'd soon come.

"I'm ready now, grandfather."

"You wouldn't dream of going, without giving us the hornpipe, Ann? It's the pipes 'll be wailing the whole evening for you. And Felix's old fiddle 'll be harder to bear than ever with the groans there'll be in it."

"They must wait then, Terry, till to-morrow night, to ease their pain. I'm clearing the barn for a dance; so let ye both be sure to come."

"That's better news than a frothing half-gallon. Eh, Felix? Rozen your bow, and let's us play her down the road."

Even Terry's soothing old tongue pleased her. She was feeling so happy that the loss of a horn-

pipe didn't matter a pin. If that wasn't Joe, scowling at her from the turn of the wood! He might scowl till it stiffened his face, and he couldn't knock a feather out of her now.

"Good-night, Mr. Hogan. To-morrow night, Terry, I'll wear out the pipes and the fiddle to flitters. Good-night to ye all, and thank ye, thank ye."

It's near crying she was, the great content that was on her. Sorry to go she was, and glad to be alone with herself.

"I like that young man of the Hogans, Ann."

Sure it's the same taste her grandfather and herself always had. And Maurice 'd like him too. He was like the memory of a sunny day on Knock-brack.

"Aye. He's a likeable man surely. Did you ever see the likes of this of a day, grandfather?"

THIRD CHAPTER

THE wonderful silver horns of the hunters of Fionn were calling to her from across the hills. She drank in the sweet sound, peace in her heart, her whole body relaxed but alive with feeling. She had been in the arms of her lover, and now, they were going to hunt the red deer. There were the horns again. . . .

She opened her eyes with a start, and listened. Good God! The cock it was, sure enough, and it some old song she was dreaming. Was that a ghost staring at her? Sure it was only the grey face of the dawn coming through the window. What was she shivering for, and she warm? Bessie was sleeping over there in the corner without a sound out of her! It was Joe snoring. But she was well used to that.

Her body stiffened, and she stared out into the murk. Like a thick black fog it was now. It's the same her own mind was, a cold raw mist over it, not a gleam of comfort anywhere. . . . There he was, snoring away now, contented with himself, as if he hadn't said a word agin her last night. It's to pound her with a pair of beetles on the washing-stone himself and Peggy did. It was only by the dint of praying, that she kept herself from hating him . . . though she couldn't swear that she hadn't passed the limits more than once. He had a touch of decency in him, she'd

give him credit for that, and he not going as far as his aunt. He didn't throw dirty things at her, like Peggy did in her jealousy; but the denseness of him hurt her more than Peggy's hate. He was so full of himself that he couldn't bring himself to believe that she didn't love him. In the dignity of the Dunnes he was hurt. She was like a slave of one of them sultans you'd read of in the Arabian Nights, and couldn't go to a dance without "by your leave"! The man was so full of himself, that he never knew when he was sticking a knife in her. To turn it round and round he did, till she near screamed with the pain. Still, he didn't throw in her face the money he paid for her; and he stopped Peggy, when she as much as hinted at it. So long as he did that she'd have some flitter of respect for him. But he was so self-satisfied that he'd make you laugh. He'd wake up now with no suspicion on him, that he had ever hurt her. And she tied to him for life by the law of God and man!

If God only gave her Brian Hogan for a husband? But she mustn't think of him in that light. Father John often as much as said that it was another man she had in her eye. But, God knew, she never had. It was only the makings of a great friend Brian was. . . .

There was the beginnings of the real light in earnest at last, and she must get up if everything was to be ready.

She slipped out of bed, and crossed over to the wooden crate in which Bessie was sleeping. The cold of the earthen floor agin her feet always helped to take away the dead feel of the night.

Without a care in the world Bessie was, and that

look on her face. She'd have many a care, but one she'd never have, if her mother could keep it from her: to marry a man without loving him. What did trouble matter, if you had a man beside you who could see into your heart! But to have a man who saw nothing but himself wherever he looked? It was a wife that wasn't a wife at all she was, with a heart as cold and desolate as the dawn. Bessie was a sheet anchor surely, but that wasn't enough, not nearly enough.

Like a fire damped down with ashes she felt; and 'twas only in a dream she could escape and flame out at her will. . . . For a minute at a dance, maybe, or talking to one she liked, or listening to him. . . . Then there was always Joe to come back to, and Peggy. . . . A rainbow flashing for a minute her joy was, only to be put out sudden by the black night.

A queer world it was, all thrown this way and that, without rhyme or reason to it, and God doing it all they said. Anyway, there was the colour coming into the sky again, and she'd have to clean and dress herself.

She gathered her clothes into a bundle, crept on tiptoe past the bed and into the kitchen, opened the back door, stood on the step and drew a long breath.

It was the house that choked her. Peggy grudged her even the water to wash herself in. And Joe was always finding fault about the soap. She'd use the whole tub-full, and let them whistle after it. There was many a devil in her, and it's Joe and Peggy had the art of rousing them. Always bringing out the worst in her, and she having it in her to be different. It's small-minded she was

getting. And she mustn't be that, with the sky opening out like a rose, and her heart bursting to meet it. The whole world she'd like to fold in her arms, and she near drunk with the smell of the dawn and the colour of it. It made her feel as if she nearly wanted to please Peggy . . . she'd use the tin basin only.

She took a shallow basin, soap and a woollen rag from a shelf behind the door, slipped out of her nightdress and washed on the flag, beside the tub.

"Standing out there in the face of heaven, bare and naked, without your shift or a thing on you."

"Rasping at me won't cover me. Take the towel off the roller and throw it to me, Peggy."

"Hoping a man will pass you are, likely, and we expecting them early."

"There, and I clean and all—dirtying me again. Well, take that then."

She jumped into the tub of water and splashed about in it, laughing.

"Wasting the blessed water! I declare to my God, it's to slash you with the broom I'd like to."

"I'd liefer feel it than your tongue any day. If you don't throw me the towel I'll run to the dairy and splash about in the milk."

"For God's sake, stop. Running about the world in your pelt! Here it is, and my bad luck go with you. Sure it's mad anyone is that 'd wet their skin in the cold of the morning. Mad, or in the devil's keeping. No one but a Logan or a lunatic 'd do the like."

Ann rubbed herself with the coarse towel till her skin glowed.

"God bless you, it's you're mad, Peggy; only

you don't know it. Some of them ancient women used to bathe in milk, my grandfather says. For a pin I'd try it for my skin. Only I don't see how it could have a nicer colour on it. Mad? I feel sensible enough this minute to do the maddest thing you could think of."

Peggy threw up her hands in despair :

"Great God! She's as mad as a March hare, and there a threshing on us!"

"It must be the threshing, and I forgetting it and all, that puts me in such high good humour. I could fly over to Knockbrack, to see the sun coming up over the edge of the world. There's something inside of me that expects near anything grand to happen to me; to be made a queen of, or the like. Did you ever feel like that?"

"Did I ever feel a fool? Is it to the asylum you want to go now, and you dressed, or will you milk the cows?"

"And sing to Strawberry? Of course, I will. Only there'll be no need for her to be sorry for me to-day. You never had a talk with her, Peggy? She's as wise as a fairy."

Peggy crossed herself.

"May God preserve the milk from you, anyway! Mentioning the good people! It's the bad luck you'll draw down on us all. I wouldn't put it past you to be a changeling."

"I am. I'm queen of the fairies. I fly out in the night on a broomstick and dance on the strand. I'd be dead long ago only for it. There's Joe getting up, and I must be off. Don't let him wake the child."

She laughed at Peggy's half frightened, half malicious look. It's glad enough Peggy 'd be to

have her put away. Then there 'd be no one between her and all she cared for: Joe and the child. The child because it was Joe's. . . . The old hag couldn't stand Betsy either, and was glad to get her out of the house. Betsy or herself might have done something for Joe, but with Peggy's hold on him, it was worse and worse he was getting. Dan Foley's wife, that was married to him against her will, was drove to the madhouse. It's little Peggy knew the stand-by the fairies were agin that . . . and the old tales that took you out of yourself, and the sun, and the wind, and the sea.

She patted the cow on the flank as she fixed her pail. "Steady, girl, steady. You needn't put them sad eyes on you. It's only a bad thought came on me for a minute. It's a new colour has come on the world for me. . . . A great friend I made yesterday. Keep your tail quiet, and I'll sing about him to you."

She leant her head against the cow, and hummed to the music the milk made against the side of the pail. There were no words, and her thoughts flew to and fro. Would he come in the morning with the rest of the men, or would he stroll in during the course of the day, or would he only come at night for the spree?

That reminded her: she'd have to clear the barn. What sort of work was he doing at all? It must be good work from the look of him. And with a spice of danger in it, since it was kept from the peelers. He had a face that wasn't easily dismayed. It would be a great pity if anything happened to him, for all that. She didn't rightly know whether she liked his eyes best, or the sound of his voice, or the things he said. They were all

of a piece like. But, best of all, she liked the way his mind ran with hers. The way he kept step with her was past belief. If he was Joe now, it's many a dance they'd have, of a night, in the barn. Or on the kitchen floor itself, and it well fitted for the like. . . . It'd be her old dreams coming true. They'd get rid of Peggy some way. It'd never do to have her there, and they sitting in front of the fire of an evening. The way he made her laugh over them stories about the Feis! She could see them acted before her very eyes, he made them that alive. Well, if Strawberry couldn't tell her how to get rid of Peggy, she'd have to ask Blacky.

She fixed her stool by the black cow and began to milk. But, even Blacky, with all the goodwill in the world, couldn't turn him into Joe. . . . It was how they'd sit up till all hours, and she never to tire of listening to him. She'd be able to say the things to him that were inside her, that she never yet said to man or mortal, not to her grandfather even, nor to Maurice, though it's a power of things they used all to talk about, and she often putting back the clock of a night, and she a girl, pretending it was early, and it a eleven or twelve maybe. It's little temptation she ever had to do that since.

But she wasn't going to think of dark things to-day, and the sun up already. If that wasn't the noise of the machine being took into the haggard! Only Whitey to do now. And the sun dancing above her stall. A great thing it was to be alive.

"Listen, Whitey, can't you?"

The cows knew as well as herself the great day that was in it. Grand company they were, and she down in herself. But to-day they were sharing

her joy. It warmed her blood, too, to hear the voices and the laughing of the men and the girls. That was Betsy's laugh. And that was Mike Devlin shouting to the men to stay up the wheels. It's out among them she'd be all the day long, and Peggy 'd have to look after things in the house. Anyway, her mother 'd be over later, and could help. It's the enjoyable time the two of them 'd have, quarrelling over whether the Finnegans or the Dunnes were the most notable people in the world, and making it up again over the faults of herself and Betsy.

But it's little she'd care if the whole world, except a few, maybe, were pulling her to pieces, to-day.

"More power to you, Ann. It's early you're at it. Could I be doing anything to help you at all?"

"Easy, Whitey, can't you? Sure you ought to know it's Betsy is in it. It's not much you ought to be doing, and the state you're in, Bet, agra. How did you manage to get across so soon?"

"It's the good training I have your mother in. But they won't be ready with the machine for some time yet, and I'd far rather be doing things than sitting still."

"My poor girl!"

"Your rich girl, you mean. It's proud I am of it. Many more I hope I'll have. What are you doing yourself, when you ought to be in the same way? Peggy is all the time complaining that you're not doing your duty by the land, and you having no son yet."

"Easy, can't you, Whitey. You nearly knocked over the can. It's them cows are the caution."

If Betsy only knew how she hated that kind of talk she'd have some compassion in her. It put her all of a tremble, and took the sun out of the day.

"It's a great opinion you have of your aunt, all of a sudden."

"Oh, the devil take her. Let me carry one of the cans for you? I know as well as another when you want me to shut up."

She followed slowly with the second pail. Often, she'd like to talk it out with Betsy, but no good'd come of it. A woman that was in love with her man'd never understand what it meant to be tied to one that gave you the cold shivers. Betsy'd be kind, but it wasn't in her to feel all the horror of it. That was why there was so much trouble in the world: the happy people had no real knowledge of what the unhappy ones suffered. Betsy'd say she was sorry with her lips; and she'd feel it, too, in a way, but there'd be a stone wall she could never cross over. The same with Father John. She sometimes doubted whether God Himself knew. God was the greatest puzzle of all to her, and He so good, and knowing everything. It's two voices He had like. When He spoke from the altar, or within in the confessional, He said one thing; but when He whispered to her in the depths of her heart on a still evening, He said another. It wasn't much of a hand He ever lifted to help her. . . .

There was Betsy, walking the world like a queen, with her ungainly figure and all, swelled out with love and pride as much as by the child. A queer mystery love was. To start with, Tom and Joe were as like as two peas. They were like enough

still : Joe a little harder and more forbidding maybe : and Tom a little softer and more likeable. Yet love made Tom a king in Betsy's eyes, while. . . . But God knew she wanted to be fair to Joe, and to do her best not to hate him. What was he coming into the dairy for now ? The start he knocked out of her, with that cross face on him.

"What are ye doing with that milk, pouring it into the pan ? Where's the creamery can ?"

"Where's your grandmother ? What'll the men drink through the day ?" Betsy said, in anger.

"Isn't the buttermilk good enough for them ? What did I tell you, Ann ?"

"Well, it's not enough for me. Not a drop of milk will go out of the house this day while I'm in it. You may be able to hector your wife, Joe, but it's little change you'll knock out of your sister."

Ann shrank back. It wasn't fear of him was on her. Only pity for his rages about nothing, and contempt for the weakness that was making him slink off now under Betsy's tongue. And he'd have it out on her after. That's the sort of man he was.

"Why don't you stand up to him ? He has a good streak in him, if you'd only try and keep it on top. You're letting his meanness get the upper hand on him."

That, no doubt, was what Betsy did with Tom ; but, then, there was love between them. Tom didn't make her dry up, and shrink into herself like a badly washed piece of flannel. Only the flannel wasn't hurt, and Joe hurted her. Not so much in her body, though that often had a queer beaten kind of feel in it too when he was by, as in her mind and her soul. There was no use in trying

to explain it all to Betsy, since she couldn't explain it even to herself. It all came of having to live with a man that froze you up. When she was a girl she could see all Joe's good points. But his good points and his bad, were now equal to her. He was only the man she was in constant dread of, that he'd touch her. Like a frightened mouse she lay beside him at night, a cold fear on her heart till the sleep released her: creeping into bed when he was asleep, and scurrying out before he was awake. No fear she had of him in any other way.

"Oh, I'll stand up to him right enough," she laughed. "I'm going to have a dance in the barn to-night."

"That's a daring thing to do. Neither Peggy nor himself 'll like it."

"They can lump it then. That reminds me—we can't put the butter on the table like this. We'll make it into little quality pateens. Where's the prints?"

"I never seen such a girl. A face as long as next year on you one minute, and you in a bad dream like. There, they're there in front of your eyes. And the next, as gay as a lark. It's a good wedge of butter they'd rather see fornint them than little pateens."

"Can't you hear the whirr of the machine? Sure if I'm in the dumps itself an odd time, I can easily rise out of myself. Some people might be coming to-day that 'd be used to pats. Take one print, you. And between us we won't be long. I must run in after, and see that Peggy puts on the right tablecloths. It'd be like her to put on the darned ones, and they iron-mouldy too. You'd never know who'd come. They say them girls of

the Kerrigans are up to all kinds of high figaries with the butter, since they were at the Agricultural School. Still, I defy them to make pats better than them there !”

“ It’s in the fine fettle you are surely. And I thinking Joe was weighing you down, and crushing the youth out of you. Speaking of the Kerrigans. They have a young man staying with them, that your grandfather speaks high of. But sure you met him yourself at the Cross ? One of them girls ’ll likely seize him.”

Ann laughed :

“ The idea of that ! ”

She checked her words and spoiled a pat, a slight frown puckering her brow. The same thought had struck herself. But it had slipped away, somehow, when she got to know him. Why, that ’d be as bad as herself and Joe ! She wouldn’t have that for him. The nicest of pats weren’t half good enough for him, nor the best of tablecloths. As for them Kerrigans ! She didn’t know any girl good enough for him. It gave her a sort of pain to think of him being married at all. Maybe, one day, she’d pick out a wife for him herself. But the right sort was as hard to find as a needle in a haystack.

“ For why, now ? ” Betsy interrupted her thoughts.

“ It’s up to his eyes in the good of the country he is.”

“ I never knew that to blind a man to a woman. Though it’s bad eyesight he’d have, I admit, if he took one of the Kerrigans.”

Ann was willing to leave it at that. Betsy had no sense. But, then, she didn’t know the man.

It's the kind of sight he had that could see what you were thinking, let alone judge well your face and figure. It's likely never to take a wife at all he would, like her uncle Maurice, it'd be so hard to satisfy him.

"It's the dainty lot of pats they are, but they're pure waste on them men," Betsy sighed.

"Tidy up the barn, like a decent girl; if it's not too tired you are, with what you're carrying. The noise of the machine is in my blood, and I must run out and see who's there. It's not much you'll have to do, and the floor readied for the winnowing. It's a regular muss my head is in, with the excitement of one thing and another. And see that the bread is cut right. And the eggs are not too hard nor too soft. Just as if you were expecting the priest. I'd like everything to be as decent as could be. And keep Peggy from skimping."

"It's half daft I'd be about you if I was a man, and that look on you," Betsy exclaimed, clasping her in her arms and kissing her.

"Press me tight, Betsy. And don't mind if I'm crying itself. I don't know what's on me. It's the feel of your arms around me that must have done it. There's some great joy all over me, with an ache of misery running through it."

"I'm blest if it isn't another child!"

Thank God, anyway, it couldn't be that. Betsy wasn't much of a help, except to cry against.

"It's nothing only foolishness, or the music of the machine, or something. It's you're the comfort, Betsy. I'm all right again now. I think I'll slip in and do up my hair."

"A handbercher 'd come readier. You'll want one, anyway, to keep the dust off it."

She might then. But she wouldn't wear one for all that. It's to work in the hair that God gave her she would to-day, and it fairly passable with the sun on it. Besides, she couldn't stand being bound up.

Everything was so cheerful: Betsy smiling on her way to the barn, the sun on the whitewashed walls, the cock strutting across the bawn. The old elm tree looked less like a witch than it used to. The sky was bluer. And something inside her was going out to it all. Like as if her heart was stretching, eager to take everything in the world within it. She wouldn't go in, and have Peggy disturb the feeling. . . . That was her mother's voice. It must be the glory of the day was on her mother, too, she sounded so pleasant.

It's to have a peep at herself in the doubled-up sash of the room window she would, and it as good as a looking-glass. At the same time, she could see if the child was all right. Well, it's not a fright she was anyway. They had done up the room without waking the child. And the room table was laid grand, with the best cloth. It's in there they'd put a stranger. . . .

What sort of work 'd he be giving her to do at all? She wished she was a man, and could go round the country with him, rousing the people. It was queer how often he seemed to be in front of her eyes, in a patch of sun, up among the leaves, agin the sky, well-nigh anywhere she looked. There was something in his face that made her think of him often. It's a great hold entirely he'd be sure to get on the people. . . .

She stood at the haggard gate, and shaded her eyes from the sun. There he was, sure enough.

It was a satisfying thing to watch him, and he as good with the pike as he was with a story. It was a wonder they weren't taking more notice of him, the picture he made: his arms and neck bare, the sun on his face, the way his muscles stood out as he handled a heavy load, as easy as you'd lift a saucepan.

They were leaving too much of the work to him, all the same. Another pike was wanted, to handle all that of straw. That one, lying idle in the cartshed, 'd suit her. There, it had just the right balance. She wouldn't have to waste any time in welcoming the throng of people, and they all so busy. Though it's to watch them all day she'd like to, and not do any work at all . . . the gold sheaves flying, and the goldier straw. Even the dust was like fairies playing about in the sun. And the monster of a red machine, growling and shouting that he was going to tear everything to bits, and he only playing after all, tossing out the straw with great hoarse laughs.

"It's a hard place you took, Mr. Hogan. And 'twill grow with the rick."

"Then we'll grow with it. I was wondering what had become of you."

It was he could give you a look that put courage into you. And he to be bothering about the likes of her at all! Like a feather the biggest pikeful was in her hands. The highest rick in the world couldn't daunt her. Faster than any rick her strength was growing. And more than her strength. It was the laugh of him or something, or a new way he looked at her. It was the feeling she had that her soul was growing. Walking on the air she was. A grand new colour had come

nto the morning. The sloe hedge was glittering as it never was before. The shadows of the stacks were like the sky at night above Lismeedy, a cool violet glow in them.

But it's romancing she was, and the shift sticking to her back with sweat. What was that? Thank God, the belt of the machine had slipped, and her back near broke. She could draw her breath now.

"Lie flat on your back."

It's the great sense he had, too, and she never thinking of taking a rest like that before. The clatter had been a band of music, but the silence was heaven. It was like the minute after waking, when your body had no weight, and you were made of rest and happiness.

"It'll take a good half-hour to ready it. We'd all better have our breakfasts, and not be wasting time."

That was Joe, of course, breaking in on her peace. It's always talking of time he was, and he not knowing the value of it. All the same she had great hunger on her. And Brian Hogan was moving.

"I was up at five o'clock."

She laughed and sat up:

"I was thinking the same thing. Only I have near an hour more hunger on me. I must be running in to ready things for ye."

"Don't, yet a minute. Let the others go on."

With a beating heart she watched him take a leather wallet from a buttoned pocket of his shirt.

"Read the papers in this if you can snatch half an hour during the day, and you'll get the drift of what we're after. There's enough there to get me

into trouble before I'm ready for it, so keep a tight hold on them."

Little waves of pleasant, excited feeling passed through her. Her face glowed, and there was a mist in her eyes. Almost like a god he looked . . . and he believed in her.

"You trust me?" she faltered.

"Why, of course."

Something was welling over in her, as if her heart was full to overflowing: a great respect for him, gratitude, a sort of reverence. The confident look that was in his wide set eyes. . . . And he was right, he could trust her to the death.

"It's this way. I'm stirring up the men. And I want you to do the same with the women. A word here and there—you know the sort of thing. We have a good many men already, but we must have the women—and all the men. I'm putting you on the committee. There will be difficulty. There may be danger."

She fumbled with the wallet, to hide her trembling hands. It wasn't fear was on her, but a great joy. What did a spice of danger matter? It would be dreadful though if anything happened to him. . . . She wouldn't let that pain get hold of her, and it near blinding her for a second with the ache of it. But he looked as if nothing could hurt him.

"You'll be careful of yourself?"

"Catch me not to. I was only warning you. It's really rather fun—that side of it, I mean."

She joined in his laugh. If all the peelers were like the pair watching Thady Duggan's pub, it's not much trouble he'd have. Anyhow, it's the great big boy he was, with the laugh of a child.

It's a strong chord of friendship there was between them. The same things struck them to laugh at. . . . There was a rip in his shirt. Them Kerrigans weren't much help to a man, and he so far away from home, with no one to look after him. And, maybe, his socks wanted mending. She'd have to contrive some way to look after him rightly. Besides, there 'd be the work for the cause between them now.

She pressed the pocket underneath her skirt. It brought him nearer to her, to feel the wallet there.

"The papers won't be enough. You'll tell me what to do, and the like? You'll talk to me?"

"Plenty."

How he frightened her, for a second, the way he said it. Half barking it at her, as if he was angry with her. But he wasn't. She knew that from how he looked at her, just as if his eyes were a cloak around her. She had the feeling of being covered all over by them.

"Hadn't we better be going in to our breakfasts?"

"It might be better."

Savage enough he said that. And there was a great silence on him now. It was other things was occupying him, no doubt. Them organisers had a great deal on their mind.

FOURTH CHAPTER

"It's like a young girl in the first joy of her love you are, Ann, instead of a sober married woman."

"Arrah, go along with you, Bet. It's just alive I am. Isn't it all fine?"

She kissed Betsy good night. She could kiss her till she ate her all up. Light in the head she was, with the joy that was on her. She could kiss the whole world and take a heartful of pleasure out of it . . . kiss Peggy herself, and she scowling over there in the corner. Kiss Joe, even, and he looking contented for once, the corn being all in, and the straw rick thatched before the rain came on. Without taking from her joy by a single ha'porth, she envied Bet her peaked face and the child she was carrying.

"No, thank you, Matt. It's tired out I am."

She couldn't dance any more. It's afeared she was, that she'd fly through the roof. That was God's truth. May God forgive her for telling the lie to Matt, and she not tired at all. But she must go on leaning against something solid, to keep herself from fading off into the air, like the smoke from the men's pipes, or the song of a lark and it wasting away in the sky. As long as she had the cool iron of the chaff-cutter to her back, it's sure enough she ought to be that it's on the earth she was, and not in heaven as she felt. Not that she could be certain sure of anything but the great happiness that was on her.

She was bent on making a friend of Brian Hogan. But sorra smile he cast her the whole day, since breakfast time. When she was a girl she'd dislike a man for that. It was queer that it didn't matter a thraneen now. She had the same delight in looking at his broody cross face, as she would have, and it lit up with a smile. And she must say for him that he had a great gentleness in his voice, and he talking to her, a note of sadness on him. . . . The sort of sadness you'd have, and you singing "Silent O Moyle" or the like in what Felix Doherty, and he so knowledgeable about the music, 'd call a minor key. . . .

To talk and talk about the movement he did, the gaiety seemingly drained out of him, just as if it was listening she was, and she only lost in the sound of his voice and pitying the sad look on his face. Some day, when she was more in tune for it, she'd get him to tell it all to her over again. For as God was her judge, she had a love for her country. Though somehow to-day it's little interest she could take in it, only as an excuse maybe for hearing him talk. It was hard to think of risings and death, with all the joy that was inside her and round about her. She couldn't believe that there was any wrong at all in the world, and nothing meeting her eye but beauty.

Great pleasure she had in seeing Jim Duggan kissing Susy Canavan behind the stack; and it's the armful of blessing she prayed God might send down on them, though Father John 'd say it was a sin itself, and he maybe giving them a strong penance for it. The look on their faces, all through the day after, was the heart's delight.

Trees and the flutter of a leaf agin the sky, and

a rag of colour on the sea used to lift her heart most in times past ; but to-day anything her eyes looked on had great beauty in it : the hair on a man's chest, or the sweat pouring down his face. Even the plainest girl in the haggard, Tessy Burke, the tip of her nose moreover all scorched red with the sunburn, had a look on her when her eyes fell on Tomsy Delahunty, that'd make you think of the Blessed Virgin or Cleopatra or Helen of Troy, or any of them great beauties that shook the world and made men tremble before them like a pine wood under a big storm.

And, what made the whole day like a day out of the song book, went on into the night. . . . It wasn't the old barn at all that was in front of her eyes, but. . . . What the devil was her name ? . . . One of them ancient queens of her grandfather's she was ! That was it, Dido. More like Dido's palace the barn was, or a dance hall in a fairy glen in Tir na n'og. The guttering dips were fairy torches. It wasn't candlesticks at all the pint bottles were, and the candlegrease half hiding them. Shining jewels they were. And the men and girls were like trees dancing at a great pace, a beauty in every bend and movement of them, that'd near make you sick, if it didn't lift you clear above all the weakness of the flesh.

From the look on old Felix Doherty's face you'd know that his sightless eyes were seeing it all just as she was, a trance of beauty on him. Just as if the rasping of his old fiddle was the very music the angels played on golden harps before the throne of God. It's to think you would, that his fiddle was made by one of them great Italians, instead of out of a Day and Martin blacking box

by Felix himself. To sound like Heaven itself it did.

“Why arn’t you dancing, Mrs. Dunne?”

“It’s drunk with it all I am, Mr. Hogan, and that’s the truth.”

“I feel like that.”

But, sure, she knew he would. It was the wonder of the world that she knew what he was thinking and feeling without him telling her, and he a stranger almost. She could well believe now in the truth of any dream she ever had, and she feeling such great comfort out of leaning agin the same chaff-cutter with him. It was like as if something was flowing back and forth, from one to the other of them, that the eye couldn’t see and the mind had little knowledge of. Maybe it’s how they knew other in ages long past. Her grandfather had tales of that kind of thing, and could put a name on it, though it had slipped her memory. She doubted, anyway, if he put the right twist of his lips into saying it. Anyhow, it was a true thing, no matter what the right name for it was. Didn’t the poet, with the heart of Jesus Christ Himself, that came to start the co-operative bank at Brinney, believe in it.

Maybe it’s lovers herself and Brian were in them old times. . . . But she mustn’t think about that, and she a married woman. What would Father John say to her at all, at all? Still, what harm was there in thinking about it, and it happening, maybe, thousands and thousands of years ago. How could Father John rake any sin out of an ancient thing of the kind, and it so far back? Maybe it was Dido herself she was, and he that man with the queer name, that came wandering

out of Troy. . . . But, that lad was too poor spirited entirely for the likes of Brian. It'd be more like him to be that hero who went to hell for a woman—it's them Italians were always the great lovers—and they going on loving other to this day, taking their heart's delight out of it, their love lifting them above all the pain in spite of the live turf and brimstone the devils were ladling over them night and noon. . . .

Good God above! What had come over her at all. . . . It's melting away with the delight of the thought of it she was. A great weakness on her. . . . A sort of faint that you'd like to last for ever. And it wasn't of the Italian she was thinking at all, but of Brian. . . . The sleeve of him burning into her, and it only just touching her elbow; he leaning back quiet agin the chaff-cutter, without a word out of him. Not that she'd move her hand if you gave her Heaven to do it. Still, maybe, it wasn't right to feel in Heaven while you were a sinner on the earth. . . . It was a holy feeling she had right enough. . . . She couldn't think of anything, she wouldn't think of anything, only of the happiness that was on her. . . . She wouldn't listen to Father John. . . . No, not to God himself. What harm was it, if she was a married woman? If they didn't like it they could lump it.

God forgive her for thinking the like. It was the great maze she was in, that tempted her to put a slight on the priest, let alone on the good God. Only dreaming she was. It'd be alright if she didn't think of them Italians. She'd tell it all to Father John, and stand any penance he'd like to put upon her for it.

But why would she tell him, and there nothing at all in it? It might, maybe, be the devil, and he trying to get the blind side of her? But she hadn't given in. . . . Wasn't Brian just only Mr. Hogan to her? A stranger you might say. There was gall in that. . . . But she knew what was right by Father John, and God, and her marriage . . . not that she owed Joe anything. Still, if God said she did, who was she to stand up agin Him? And she wouldn't hurt Father John for the world. . . . Well, not for a great deal, anyway.

If she was anywhere near the half-tierce she'd take a sup of porter, though she hated the taste of it, just to steady her and make her see clear. . . . Not but she was feeling miles better already. It was surely the Old Boy making believe he had her. But there was nothing at all in it. Nothing, anyway, to stop her going on being a friend to Brian. Wasn't she well bred in her duty by Father John? And Brian the first real friend, as you might say, she ever had, too!

It was how she felt in talking to him, that he was like one of them lilies on the Virgin's altar within in the convent. His talk was like that . . . like a spring well. . . . It was how he made her feel clean even to look at him. . . . She'd die for shame ever to have a bad thought about him. . . . 'Twas the devil for certain. And if she had the like, may God forgive her, it's to die ten deaths she would, for him to know of it! She'd not only die, but she'd sink into the earth, to the very centre of it, before she'd feel safe from the disgrace of it. . . . It was that way she felt about him: that any weakness or meanness in her'd be a hurt to him. . . . Great friends entirely they were,

"It's pale you are. Would you like to take the air for a minute?"

It's the great kindness was in his voice. Too kind and thoughtful he was for her to worry him with her figaries. And to tell him all that—

"It's the music is calling me. Let us dance them all down."

"That's what I'd like."

The great glow that was on his face! And the spirit of him always meeting hers. . . . What was she thinking of? She couldn't think. . . . It was all a dream, and she was floating on a cloud. . . . They were, the both of them, only one person flying through the air, all the lights of heaven dancing past. . . . Was it the stars, or her heart, was making the music that filled her . . . that she moved in? They were alone in the whole world . . . the voices coming from far off were music.

"Leave the whole floor to them, I say."

"Was ever the like seen in Clasheen?"

"No, nor in Lismeady, I tell you."

"Strike me dead, if two angels out of heaven could foot it like them."

'Twasn't dancing at all she was. . . . She was one of them tops, that you couldn't see spinning, they went so fast . . . she was the music. . . . He was herself and all the music of the world . . . he was the whole world and the God above it. . . .

"Lean on me, or you'll fall."

What could she do but laugh, with all the happiness that was on her. She had to cling to him, to prevent her feet giving from under her. It was the barn was dancing now, and the lights, and the throng of people. . . . Like a child she felt again, with all the handclaps and the cheering.

“The like was never seen since her father, God rest him, danced down the barony within in Lis-meedy.”

“In the whole of Ireland there isn’t her equal.”

She liked them to compare her to her father. But it was her grandfather who could pierce to the heart of a thing :

“It wasn’t the stepping that surprised me, Ann, for I knew you could beat the world in that ; but a sort of new life shining out of you.”

That was how she felt . . . as if she was all aglow from the heart out. As if the body and the mind of her, and her soul, were lit up by them sort of lights you’d see in quality rooms. Up at the big house, or the like. Father John Moriarty had the same in the room he read in. Little coloured silk shadeens softening the candle light, so that you dropped your voice out of respect for the beauty of it. Glory be to God ! ’tis she was the happy woman to have made a friend who could strike a light like that in her heart, putting a new colour on her and on the world. It was straight out of the hands of God such a friend came to her.

“Now.”

’Tis he was the queer man, all the same, shoving her from him, as if she burnt him, a hard twist in his voice ; and a face like a mask of flint on him. It’s to tremble, however, his hands did, and they holding her, just like the fiddle-strings and Felix Doherty tuning them. . . . But, maybe, it was only the excitement of the dance was on him. Still, the light in his eyes, and the way his lips twitched, in spite of all his mastery over his face, ’d give heart to any girl he had to do with.

She mustn't let her mind run along that road, and she a married woman and all. . . . But a friend now? Even though he was a great, great friend itself, without his like in the wide world? Father John, surely, couldn't rake up rhyme or reason agin that. . . .

"Haven't you any words for me, Ann?"

"Uncle Maurice!" she shouted, springing forward. Only, just as suddenly, to stop short.

The sound of his voice she knew. And himself, for that matter; though she had a moment's doubt over him, and he so changed. It was the look of him that gave her such a shock. It wasn't so much that his beard and hair had gone white, and that he was so thin that his bones stood out. It was the look in his eyes, like you'd see in a suffering dog, all the old glint of fun gone out of them.

"Oh, Maurice, Maurice," she cried ^{as} she fell on his neck.

All she could do was to kiss him, and cry her fill. He was all she wanted to brim over her cup of joy. The wonder of the world it was, for him to come in top of them this night of all! Tons and tons she had to say to him, only she couldn't find a word. . . . It wouldn't be fair to be carrying her joy to him, and he in pain. And if he wasn't stiffening under her arms, till 'twas like a ramrod he felt! And it used to be nicer to kiss him than Betsy even, and she so forthcoming.

"What's on you at all, Uncle Maurice? Was it wrecked you were or what?"

"There, there," he said, pushing her away from him gently. "That's it, that's it."

For half a second there was the old mock in his

eyes. But it was the bitterness of his voice that frightened her. As bitter as one of them olives he used often to bring back with him, that you'd have to spit out if you drove a tooth into it.

"Where, where? how?" she asked, her voice trembling, laying her hands again on his shoulders.

He shook her off roughly. Then, as if repenting of his roughness, he kissed her on the forehead.

"Oh, it wasn't that kind of a wreck. Only joking I was."

She stared at him in wonder. It was the queer change had come over his jokes, and he speaking in the tone of voice of a man that had just got hell for his portion, bidding defiance to God in the misery of his heart. Still, the kiss he gave her was a gentle sort of kiss, like her grandfather's. Or, more like a kiss that Father John, and he a saint, once gave her and she near dying when she was a child.

"Anyhow, I'm glad to see you, Ann. It's sad enough you were when I saw you last. But now you have the face of a happy woman on you."

She smiled gratefully at him. But why did he wince? And, though he spoke with all the kindness of the Uncle Maurice she used to know, he had to drag the words out of him.

"If I thought Joe could have done all that for you, it's the better I'd be thinking of him these four years."

She laughed. That had all his old fun in it; though he didn't know how funny it was. . . . She watched him greet one neighbour and another. Seemingly he must have come in during the dance, as he had met the most of them already. . . . She'd like to tell it all to him. But she couldn't;

especially with all that of pain on him, whatever it was.

Now he was being made acquainted with Brian. How well met the both of them were in straightness and honour, honesty shining out of their eyes. Thin and all, and peaked, as Maurice looked, he was the handsomer for it. Though he wasn't near as handsome as Brian. . . . The two greatest friends she ever had! It's the great friends they must get to be. . . . Of course, she was leaving her grandfather out of the count, and he more like God Himself in the tenderness of his heart. . . .

There was Brian leaning now against the side of the chaff-cutter—the side she had been leaning against. It's to kiss that moody look off his face she'd like to, if he wasn't so much of a stranger . . . and if God wasn't agin it. . . . It was queer how she felt just as near to him, and the whole floor of the barn between them, as when she was standing beside him. . . . A great peace all over her. Just as if she could speak to him without saying a word at all, and he'd understand everything. When she shut her eyes she could see him . . . could hear him talking to her, inside of her . . . like as if he was her own mind speaking to her.

“There's no call at all to tap the second half-tierce.”

Why didn't God give Peggy a heart? Or was it only crusted over in her?

“Tap it, I say. Of course, the people must have their drop of drink. The other half barrel is empty, the last half gallon drawn from it and all.”

There was that to be said of Joe: he could now and again rise to decency. He'd grudge the drink,

but he could give it with a sort of an air. And feel generous over it too, if the generous side of him was on top. And it was on top to-night, with the corn all safe, and a better yield on it than last year. It was handsome he was looking, and he in such high fettle. She must keep clear of him to-night. . . . The child sleeping up in the loft, out of the way of the clatter of the spree, 'd be a good excuse for her. . . . If it went to that, with the good humour on him, he was better looking than Brian or Maurice, and they both looking as cross as two sticks. . . . But it's a beauty in the heart they had, if there was a cross look on them itself.

“No. Sorra other step I'll dance to-night.”

She couldn't, with the memory of such a dance on her. . . . There was the moon outside, and a night of stars, the sky swept clean by the rain. It's a breath of air she'd like to take. Would she ask Maurice to go out into the night with her? But it wouldn't be fair on him, and he just getting back his temper, with all the pleasant talk the throng of people were putting on him. Anyhow, he'd be there to-morrow, and for many a day. So would Brian Hogan for that matter. Thinking deep he was, no doubt, with that high look on his face, plotting for the good of the people. Maybe it's to explain things to her he would, if she asked him to walk out as far as the gate with her. . . . Anyway, it would be grand entirely to stand under the stars with him.

FIFTH CHAPTER

IT was the luck of the world that the threshing at Mick Flynn's was put off till to-morrow, on account of the rain.

What would she do at all, if she had to be meeting a throng of people, and the whole of last night still pounding at her brain? Asking questions of her, of which she didn't know the answers . . . that she didn't want to answer. What she wanted, was to go on living in the glory of it all.

Love it was that had come upon her. . . . No dream at all, this time, but a real live thing that blotted out the world and lifted her up into the seven heavens. The whole night long, and she lying awake on the box bed in the loft, she drank her fill of it, in little sipeens and in big drinks, tasting it this way and that. Hatred she had of the blessed sleep, that she used to long for, and it so often helping her to forget. Fear she had on her that she'd miss one minute of her thoughts.

It was the luck of God that Joe was out of the way, and he gone in to Lismeedy before she came downstairs. And that Peggy made a row, the first thing, that brought a long silence after, through calling her a dirty name for dancing wild with a strange man. She was glad that Peggy misnamed her, for it kept the image of Brian before her eyes during the few minutes of their give and take of high words. And, for once, anyway,

Peggy got worse than she gave. And little Bessie didn't come in the way of her love of him at all. Wasn't Bessie, somehow, a child of love, when all was said? And since there was never real love on her before, wasn't the child, some way or other, his?

In that half a second at the gate, when, in the excitement of his talk, Brian put his hand by accident on the top of hers, she knew it all. The touch of her sobered him too, and he stopped dead in his talk. No word was spoken between them. But, sure, he had burned love into her flesh by that touch of his hand, that'd live in her to her dying day, and far beyond. She read it, too, as clear as print in his eyes, which showed plain what the muscles of his lips tried hard to withhold from her.

She had the strength and pride of ten women in her, and she standing silent beside him, looking up at the stars. He was in her blood and in every breath she drew, and he tingled in every nerve of her body. He was the life in her heart, giving a new colour to the world. He made her see the moon rightly for the first time, the friendly laughing face of it that blessed their love. He gave a new meaning to the stars, and to the shadows the moon cast under the trees.

What was the word Father John often used about God, when He showed Himself to the people? Transfigured, that was it. It was how he transfigured everything; the new coat of whitewash on the house walls, the straw rick, with its fresh thatch, peeping out from behind the cow house.

But, sure, she had no words for it. It's blasphemy she'd have to be using to say what was in her.

For it was almost like the living God he made her. May God forgive her for saying the like. And if it came to that, what else could she say but the truth?

It was how her whole life crowded in on her in a minute, and she lived through eternity, glorying in him. . . . Wasn't it his face had been on every one of her grandfather's heroes? that she saw in every love song she ever knew? and in every one of her dreams of a lover? From the time she was a child he had been racing down the track of the sun to her, his face hid; but last night he was as clear as the day to her. Leaning over the old wooden gate beside her, with the look of wonder of a child on his face, it was just as if he, as well as herself, had found what he had been looking for all his life. . . . It was how the good God, who made love, had let her see little weeny ghosts of it ever since she was able to notice things at all, for fear she'd be blinded entirely by it when at last she came on it, in its fullness, all of a sudden. . . .

She had laughed the happiest laugh of her life—though it's to cry she did, with the joy that was on her, the minute he went—and he starting up and putting a cross face on him, and muttering "we mustn't, you know," and he off into the barn with him, his head hunched between his shoulders. . . .

Sure she might as well try and stop the breakers below there, and they singing him loud to her this minute; or the sunlight, and it flooding the fields with images of him. . . . How simple the man was with all his knowledge! But that was a hard word for Brian, and he made of all the beauty and the glory of the earth and sky. A child he

was, in his innocence, that she'd fold to her heart till he was one with her . . . who was one with her . . . anyway, who was all that she ever dreamed or wished herself to be. . . .

God ! What a grand thing it was to have found love. She without a blink of sleep on her all the night, and her straw mattress was a down bed ! The whitewashed rafters and the black smoky thatch were a jewelled palace, with the stars for candles, and the moon herself for a lamp. . . . And they all as nothing to the light and the glory within her !

And here she was now, just Ann, in her cotton dress, on her way to have a cup of tea with Maurice and her grandfather ; and she all that besides ! A greater wonder to herself than Brian ever could be to her. . . . But sure it was all him. It was he was her mind and her heart now, and her power of sight. No power or virtue she had at all of herself. She walked the earth a proud woman, and she knowing, with all the knowledge of God, that it was Brian made every step she took.

She could make a song about him, as long as the world. For what else was there to make it about ? If it was strength or truth or beauty or kindness she wanted to sing, wasn't he all of them, and more ? Hadn't he planted a new eyesight in her and a new hearing, that made her see and hear him in every sight and sound ? And she saw and heard him in them because they were more beautiful than they ever were before, and he behind them all : whether it was them raindrops clinging to the blackberry bushes, or that lark near bursting himself over the elder tree.

It's fair foolish she was. But no romancing 'd

give her the half enough of images to tell of the depths of wisdom love had put into her. . . .

Bad scran to her! if that wasn't her mother. Who knew but one day she might be able to see her different.

"What in the name of God are you dressed up for, and it a week day?"

It was easy to throw a word back, but she'd strive agin the temptation.

"It's a fine face Tom is putting on the house."

"In a hat, and it seeing better days too! But 'tis you were always the headstrong girl. If it was my advice you took, it's driving in on me now in your covered car you'd be, in silks and satins, and a gold chain around you."

"It's in the King of Ireland's coach I'm riding, if you want to know. And it all made of gold and diamonds, and a score of horses drawing it. Where's my uncle Maurice?"

"Ye are well met, I'll say that. Maybe it's the Sooltan of Turkey he is? Without a second shirt to his back this time, and hardly a word out of him!"

"There's some heavy sorrow on him surely. Did he let out what it was at all?"

A queer sort of look her mother gave her. But, quick enough, she brushed it away with a scowl:

"Did the grave ever let out its dead? But who'd mind about a Logan, and it always one extreme or another with them? It's not sorry I am to see him shook, and all the bitterness he threw on me, this many a year. Thank God, I have my pigs to mind, and not to be bothering about the likes of ye."

She watched her mother walk, head erect,

towards the pigstye. It was hard to believe that she was ever shook by love, the bitter side of her she turned to the world; except to Tom; and, even more, to his childre. Still, there was love in her somewhere, though it's blighted it might be itself. The softness she saved on her daughter she was wasting now on Betsy's young devils, God bless them.

"Cead failte, Ann, asthore. 'Tis a grand light you throw on the bawn when you come into it. The tea is wet and all."

"I need it, after the black shadow my mother tried to throw across me."

"Arrah, don't mind her at all. Believe me, it's butter she's turning into in her old age. I know; and I seeing her growing softer, day in and day out. It's only the sight of Maurice that makes her as bitter as hell."

"What's on him at all, Bet?"

"Whist! and he within. The Lord only knows. It's down in the long field Tom and the old man is, finishing up, to be ready for our own threshing. I'm taking a sup of tea down to them. Give Maurice his tea, you. And, sure, if any one can unlock him, it's you can."

She waited till Betsy had disappeared round the corner of the cowhouse. With the new power that love gave her, she might be able to lift the weight off Maurice's heart, heavy and all as it was. Hunched up he was, brooding in there, over the fire, and it hot enough in the house without a fire at all. She'd rattle the latch of the half door.

The irritation of his first startled look changed in a second. It was her own Uncle Maurice was in it, the way his eyes lit up, and he seeing her.

“It’s not like you not to be down in the field, helping them.”

“And miss having tea with the queen of the world! Isn’t it very modest we are getting!”

It’s his old trick of the talk he had, only there was a bitter edge to it. And his eyes glued on the coral necklace.

“Isn’t it a pretty?” she laughed, fingering it.

“Hell!”

She started back. Why was he scowling, a kind of hate on him? Thank God, the black fit was passing off him. It’s gentler than a child he looked now . . . like Bessie, and she wanting to make it up after she was naughty.

“It’s that damn back tooth. It goes through me like an auger,” he said, with a shrug.

“Put a drop of creosote in it. I know where Betsy keeps it.”

He laughed shrilly:

“And go back on my own cure for a thing! But I’ll promise to keep back the grin while you’re here. . . . Yerra, put off that bothered look off you. The pain is all gone. Honest to God, it is. I’ll stand on my head for you, if you like; as I used, and you a baby, or laugh into my beard.”

It’s to cry she could, with the effort there was on him. It’s the simplest way was the best, and a man in that state . . . not to pretend to notice him at all, and to let him rise out of it himself. And the tea used to always cheer him. . . . It was like Betsy to have a hot cake for them, and a bit of fresh butter.

’Twas the close inspection he was giving her, his eyes never leaving her. Could he read the love in her? The very thought of it made her

stretch, lifting her inches off the ground, and it singing in her blood. If anyone 'd understand her, he would. For a pin, she'd tell him all. It was shouting so loud within her, that the whole world must hear it. . . . Maurice above all, and he having such power of understanding.

“Black or bogwater?”

It's very intent he must be on reading her, and not listening to her at all, or he'd rise to that old joke. It's as black as the hob of hell the tea was, however; but he'd like it that way. And three spoonfuls of sugar.

“There. That's to your liking, if you haven't changed.”

“Changed?”

It's the look of hunger was on him again. . . . But the soft look, almost as if he was asking pardon of her, came quicker now. . . . There was another look of pain. . . . The whole cup of black tea, in a single drink, did him good. You wouldn't say he was looking cheerful yet; but, whatever it was, he was bearing it like a man. Without grinning under it, either. . . . a sort of calmness on him, though his fingers were restless.

“Take another cup and you'll be more yourself.”

His smile that time was something like what she remembered; as much as to say: what a damn little fool you are, still I'm fond of you. . . . his beard still wagging over it.

“It's good to be in the one room with you, Ann. A bone itself is better than wandering about the world hungry.”

“Why didn't you let on to us, and we'd send you a trifle?”

It's laughing entirely at her, like he used to, he

was now. Every bit of his old self come back again; his great kindness, his fun, the piercing eye of him that could near see through a wall, his love for her, the same that she used to dream her father 'd have for her if he was alive, and that he had for her likely, and he above in heaven; the love that'd believe in you even if you were jailed for a dirty crime, and that you'd trust till death took you . . . that you could stand being laughed at by even.

“ You'll be the death of me, Ann. 'Tis you were always the mixture of the sharpness of a weasel and the innocence of one of them saints. But sure love drives the wits wandering.”

It was only a very little wince that time. And now his eyes were like the eyes of Father John, and she telling him a sin. Ten times a greater kindness on them than if she had nothing at all to confess.

“ No one could be gladder than me, to come back and find you grown up. It's like an apple tree in bloom you are. I could feel the breath of your love in the barn the minute I opened the door, and it like God's pardon to a straying soul.”

“ It's all that, Uncle Maurice, and a whole world of beauty besides. God and His Blessed Mother thrown in, and everything grand and good that you could think of.”

And, honest to God, if it wasn't to look like praying he did, him that hardly ever bowed the knee. And, if he wasn't Maurice, you'd think there was tears on him. Anyhow, a sort of mist over his eyes. And it's talking in a dream like, he was :

“ At first, I thought it was Joe, and there was

a great spite in me agin him, on account of the way he took possession of you. I tried to argue myself into believing that you could work any miracle. I don't know when the truth grew on me; or, whether it was how I was keeping it from me. Anyhow, I didn't admit it to myself, even when I saw Brian Hogan dancing with you. Nor when I seen you looking into heaven with him, at the gate of the bawn. I know it now, anyway, and I'm glad; gladder than I could be if the most foolish dream I ever had, was made true into my hands."

It was all she could do, to mutter "thank you, Uncle Maurice," and to cry like a fool over the hand he held out to her.

The look on him now was past all her understanding. She was afeared that any word of hers would mar it. It was how a great love, like the love of God Himself, went out to her from him; while a sorrow, heavier than the big rock of Dun-corríg, was weighing him down at the same time. . . . Beyond speech the both of them were. Only she knew that God or devil could never put between them the great friendship he had for her.

"Now, tell me about him. It's a decent stamp of man he is, right enough."

Words weren't made for telling the like, but she'd try. It was how she always dreamt of him, near from her cradle up. It's the queer things that a child got hold of. . . . First, it was her father, and he dead, that'd be certain, one day, to come back and marry her. Often, it was some hero out of a song book or a story book, or out of an old tale of her grandfather's. Then, it was her grandfather himself, and she not knowing any

better, through being only seven year old, or maybe eight. Then, may God forgive her, it was that born saint out of heaven, Father John himself, for a whileen. In between, it was, maybe, one of them angels that painted the sky so as to make your heart sick with longing, and the sun going down of an evening, or one of them fierce angels that blew the sea into a storm. That was the kind of mind she had. And then . . . he'd laugh till the tears came, for her to be such a fool . . . if it wasn't himself, Maurice——

“Good God,” he groaned.

“Do, have a try at Betsy's cure?”

“It's gone. It's gone entirely. Though that was the worst yet. But I know it's gone now for good. For good and all. It's I was the fool not to pull it out by the roots long ago. But there it stuck . . . stuck. . . .”

Her eyes followed his to the open door. Please God, it wasn't her mother, coming in to put between them and their talk? But sure it wasn't. It's the wide berth she always gave Maurice, and herself too, for that matter. It's staring into the empty air Maurice was; or, maybe, at the sea, through the poplar trees. Though it's more the look of her grandfather he had, and he gazing into the eyes of God, and he praying. . . . Waking out of it gentle he was now, just like her grandfather and he having to say hoosh to a cow or the like.

“Go on, girleen, it's how I'd like to hear all that.”

The same softness in his voice too, like as if the prayer was still clinging to his lips.

For years and years she was certain sure it was him. That is, at most times. For he was

mixed up with many a saint and hero, and with one or two of them old gods of her grandfather's. Once, and he away on a long voyage, and she getting a fairing of a horn, he was cut out for near a month by Fionn. But, back he came again as fresh as ever, when the horn slipped over the gunwale on her one night. Maybe, it was how a mermaid coveted it. Sure the world knew, it's the hussies they are, right enough, who could put a spell on you when they wanted a thing off you.

Anyway, one day, and she more grown up, when a boy snatched a kiss off her, she knew it wasn't the like of that of love she had for Maurice . . . it was more like what she had for God and for her father, who, she was certain sure, was always near by, looking after her; and for Father John and her grandfather and the Blessed Mother. . . .

"But I'm tiring you out with my rameis. Is it asleep you are, Uncle Maurice, and you without a sound of a breath out of you?"

"No. No. Go on, go on," he said, swallowing hard.

"Anyway, it's the silly girl you must think me?"

There was more mock in his eyes now than she ever saw in them before. And something came on his lips to say, but he checked it. Laughing at her he was, with the queerest kind of suffering and kindness she ever saw before in the one look. . . . Where did she break off?

"Anyhow, I gave you up in all that sort of a way."

She waited for the joke he was sure to make. But, it's thinking of something else he must be. It was seldom he used to miss a chance of the kind.

Well, if it wasn't to marry him she was, sure

she put him in her second Trinity. It's sometimes she thought it a sin to use a holy name like that for men of the earth, but God didn't appear to mind, and Father John made light of it, never knowing that he was one of the three himself. At first, they used to be her grandfather and Father John and the Blessed Virgin. But when she made up her mind to put Maurice into it, she shifted the Blessed Virgin on to the heavenly Trinity, where the exact number didn't so much matter, they all being so closely connected, and put Maurice in her place. The Blessed Virgin didn't mind it a bit. Indeed, if any, she was all the more friendly. . . . It's a great comfort her own three were to her : to talk things over with them in her mind, and God not handy or the like, or it maybe a thing you wouldn't care to trouble heaven with, or 'd be half ashamed to.

Anyway, to make a long story short, it's many a boy tried to take a kiss off her ; and one or two shook her, maybe for a minute, or a day, or a week. But it wasn't the waking of her flesh only she wanted, but the world and all besides. It was half a story and half a dream her lover was to be, but a very real human man for all that. He was to come to her this way and that. . . .

Well, he knew about Joe. She'd say this for him : he wasn't a bad sort of a man. A fine man he was in some ways. No doubt, it's many a girl he could make happy. Only, he wasn't her sort. It's to see him she did, like you'd see a person in one of them looking-glasses at a fair, that'd turn anyone into a misshaped figure of fun. It's to pity him more than to hate him she did, for the things he sought for or laid stress on in his life.

Many of them, maybe, right enough for decenter women than herself, but meaning nothing at all to her, when they weren't useless or ugly or wrong.

She wouldn't dwell on that now, and the glory that was on her. Maurice 'd understand. Maybe it's knowledge he had of it himself? If he was ever shook by love, it's much the same way he'd see it. She was sure he was made like that. . . . The heavens would open, and down the path of the sun 'd come a great glory, all the beauty of the earth and sky upon him, and all the wisdom of men; and in him all the love that moved the world since the first makings of time. . . . And he just your own man all the while. And when he'd come near, it's, maybe, only of the colour of his eyes you'd be thinking, or the great kindness in them, or some little trick of his voice, or, maybe, of a mole on his neck that you'd be mad to kiss . . . millions and millions of things that you'd go on finding out, every hour and minute of the day, if you were to live as long as Methusaleh, and never come to the end of them.

It made her weak to think of him, or to talk of him. . . . Proud and glad, too. It's the dozens and dozens of ways she saw him in dream after dream . . . his mind and his heart . . . the truth and honesty of him . . . the feel of his arms, and of his lips . . . the glory of being there beside him . . . the peace of it . . . the joy of opening the half-door and seeing him at the hearth, waiting for her. He was all that, and more. It was how they set out, by different roads, the day the world was made, looking for other, certain sure to find other, for it's like two broken pieces of the one soul they were. And the one could only find its fit in the other. All through time, a sort of magnet

was drawing them to other, and at the first look or touch of a hand they were welded into one. . . . When they met at the Cross, maybe with the tiredness on her of her journey along the track of time, it was a daze was on her for a minute. . . . But she knew now . . . she knew now . . . near blinded she was with the joy of it.

“ Good God, Uncle Maurice, what’s on you at all ? What have I done at all, shouting my joy at you, and you, likely, having a mountain of misery on you ? ”

“ Don’t mind the look of me, asthoreen. It’s a sort of ague I have on me, through sleeping out once near Taranto. It’s a great joy is on me. There, there, bad cess to your mother, if she isn’t coming in on us ! You’ve found the only thing in life worth a thraneen. And, because it’s worth that, it’s worth all of this world and of the next. What a voice that woman has ! I’m glad. Before God, I’m glad.”

“ I must be off now. I couldn’t bear her tongue, with all that’s on me. And I must hurry back to the child.”

“ There’s that too. It’s a queer world we’re living in, Ann, agra. What are you going to do at all, at all ? ”

“ Arrah, don’t you be looking miserable over it, Uncle Maurice. Sure hell itself couldn’t throw a shadow on me now. It’s hardly to know I do, whether it’s on earth, air or water I’m walking. What harm could all the world do to me now ? ”

“ Damn it.”

Was it the world he was damning, that savage face on him, or her mother only, and she standing in the door ? Anyway, nothing could hurt her

now, neither the world nor hell. And, let her mother scowl as much as she liked, she was no more afeared of her than of a wren on a bush.

“It’s to wash up you would after you, if you had any piety in you.”

“It’s to do that I will, in any case. It’s pleased you’re looking to have Maurice home?”

“My bad luck to an untidy kitchen. Whose character were ye taking away, and only one cup dirtied, and the cake not cut?”

“It’s down to the field I’ll go. Genial and all as you are, Julia, it’s lighter maybe to work than to listen to your honey voice. We’ll talk all that out again, Ann.”

It’s the comfort Maurice was. And her mother could look as cross as hell without turning a hair on her, all the happiness that was on her. There she was, at it again:

“It’s into bitterness the very sight of him turns my blood. And what do you think that Betsy paid for new sheets to put on his bed, and all the the old ones used up with the childre? Eight-pence ha’penny a yard, no less.”

“There, the cup is washed now, and I must be going, mother. It’s many things I have to think of.”

“Couldn’t you stay on, and we could have a pleasant chat, and all them Logans out of the way? I’d give you good advice about many a thing. There’s talk about you, already, and that young man from beyond the mountains.”

“It’s hurrying off to meet him I am, as soon as I put Bessie to bed! Sure it’s the freer range your fancy ’ll have about us, and you alone.”

“You slut of a Logan, you.”

“It’s a slut of a Dunne I am. A real Logan wouldn’t be the like. Tell my grandfather I was sorry not to see him.”

“As if I’d waste my breath on any Logan ever born.”

It was how a woman without love on her, would tarnish you, and she your mother ten times over. . . .

Would she see Brian at the meeting only, or would there be a minute after, or before? Would Joe go to it, and he on the committee and all, and it much agin his will to be drawn into it that far?

It’s love was the great thing surely, and her heart bursting with it again. It was like her mother to try and give her a setback. But, sure, when her blood and her mind and the birds and the sea sang the same song to her, it’s little her mother or anyone else mattered. . . . What would be the right word now for the colour of the hair over his temples?

SIXTH CHAPTER

IT was how he seized on it, that overflowed her heart with the love of him.

What good would it be at all to be on a car with him, and Tim Kerrigan on the same side with one or the other of them? Even if they had no stranger to drive itself, a car or a horse 'd distract her, and she in that state. It's all alone with him she wanted to be.

Ever since she was a girl, she said she'd take that walk with the love of her heart. And just on such a day, with the sun flooding the morning. It might be better if it was the Spring, but what it lost in sound, sure it gained in colour. It was the September colour of a wood, and it late in the month, that made a deeper music in her heart than the song of a million birds. If it went to that, there was many a bird still left; and if the voice of some of them was altered itself, it was to pierce her with another kind of beauty it did, haunting her with the surprise and wonder of the strangeness of it. Like her love the voice of a bird was, or the colour of a tree. Every day that passed, she came on a fresh joy of it, different, except for how it always lifted her heart, from what shook her the day before.

And, now, they were to meet at Lekan ford, and cross the water together, and drink their fill of the couple of miles of wood on the other side.

It wouldn't take them ten minutes to attend to the business of the movement in the village of Raheen, with Dan Lynskey having it all done beforehand. She didn't tell Brian that; though he knew right well it was a matter of minutes only, and not the whole day's work that Peggy thought.

Then, there 'd be the climb up to the glen, that was stamped on her mind by her grandfather, from the time she was a girl. He and her grandmother had once climbed up to it, and the memory of it never left him to this day.

It was how he always thought her grandmother to be the queen of the world. But it was certain sure he was of it the day he walked the Bruagh glen with her. The senses fed on what they saw. And it was there only, where all the beauty of the world near struck him blind and dumb, there being so much of it crammed into a couple of miles of space, that he had a glimpse, in the outer covering of the world, of the beauty he knew to be in her soul. Though it was only a faint reflection, at the best; with all its colour and music, and the changing shapes of things, whether of a tree or of a rock, and the mountain itself bending over as if blessing the glen, and the green water laughing as it leapt from stone to stone, and a rowan tree grigging a lonely pool to smiles, through casting on it the images of its scarlet berries.

They'd see all that of beauty. Then if the power of moving wasn't entirely taken from them by the glory of the glen, they'd climb the short way up to the top of the peak, in a fit state to believe that the hard-boiled eggs and the soda cake in her bag, was a meal made by them Greek gods out of the

honey you heard talk of in their songs, and the manna some of them ancient people, that Father John had pat, found through the luck of God.

If it was wandering in her mind itself she was, the way the beauty of the day was churning her blood, it's having what she wanted she was : to see Brian in a glass that'd give the best image of him. Maybe, it's blind she'd be struck, like them that looked at the burning bush ; but, sure, anyway, she'd have the memory of the one look for ever after. It was only seeing him up to this she was, like she used to see herself in the old speckled looking-glass at home : with a throng of people about him, and the business of the movement on him, and this and that. . . . And no word of the love that ate them up, between them yet ! And she hardly to want it, she was so filled with the beauty that was on her already.

Glory be to God for it ! and it leaving her without words. . . . The crinkle of the hoar frost on the grass under her foot ; that little black ash leaf in her path ; the wintry tweet of that little rogue of a gold-crested wren, and he winking at her ; the red pinny of that poor little robineen, trying to rouse himself out of the warm coat of his feathers to face the day, hunched up in a way that'd remind you of Bessie cuddling under the bedclothes, and frost in it. . . . Sorra thing she didn't see him in, from the lacing of her shoe to the great God in the Host, that Father John, and his old fingers trembling with awe and love, lifted up to the gaze of the people at the Consecration. Like that Brian was : that you were almost afeared to look at him, for fear, one day or another, the outer cover of a man 'd drop off him ; like you

trembled at the mass, often, for fear it's the infinite God you'd catch a glimpse of, to your entire undoing, instead of the blessed bread He hid Himself under. . . .

There it was, half-past six by the chapel bell, and Father John saying early mass, and he going to help Father Duffy, after, at a station at Lisstogue !

She could take her ease, and still be at the ford, loads of time before seven. And he'd be there at the minute, if not long before.

From the hurry in her blood, one'd think that it was separated from him she was . . . and he never leaving her for a second of time. . . . Before her eyes he was now . . . and within in her brain, and in her heart and in her blood. He was always in her dreams. And, when she woke in the night, it was like as if he was in the room with her. . . . He woke her up and he sent her to sleep, and never left her sleeping or waking, though he might be miles away.

Father John often stopped short, in a sermon, and he trenching on what he called philosophy, or the like : things that always appeared to be contradicting other. But he'd have no need to stop short for her now. For, if love put her in a maze, it also showed her the truth behind many things that gave other the lie flatly. 'Tis the vain thought she had, at times, that there was nothing in man or God or in the whole world of things, that she couldn't see the truth of by the power of her love.

It even gave her a clue to Peggy, and the cause of the bitterness in her. And she could see Joe better, and with more fairness to the man . . .

good points in him that she used to be blind to. And she was sure that her mother was an open book to her . . . the three bitterest pills she ever had to swallow. Now she had nothing but pity for them. Her understanding of them, and the pity that came of it, was making her love them, in a way. They were harder on her, during the last month, than they were ever before ; but that made no more weight on her, agin them, than a husk of chaff. The way her own love had come to flower in her, made her heart go out to them . . . to their hearts, withered in them in the bud ; or, what was still worse, with Peggy, in the seed. . . . Sorrow and bitterness and hate were only the bastard childre of the love that was denied them.

There he was, already at the ford ! It was all of a tremble she was at the very sight of him. She must steady herself. . . . What was it Dan Lynskey told her about the work at Raheen ?

“ There you are, Ann.”

It was the tremble was on him too, just like was on herself . . . a great joy and shyness glittering out of his eyes. Didn't she know the feel of it well, and now she knew the look of it. . . . It was the first time he ever called her Ann.

“ It's early to bring you out of your bed.”

They were the only words she could dig out of herself to say, and they only foolish. But, it's to think it was the whole world she gave him you would, the way he laughed from down in his throat, like a blackbird, the eyes dancing in him.

It's how he led the committee that he took the bag from her. Shy and timid in one way ; with half a laugh, that tried to hide the determination

of one of them train engines you'd see nearing Lismeedy at sixty mile an hour.

And the moody look of him at the stepping stones, and the water near covering them. It was just like a boy he was, hating the trouble of moving his shoes. It's to make faces he would, in a minute, over the coldness of the water.

"It's to set you the good example I will."

But she had no power in her to take off her shoe, and he laying his hand on her arm, to stop her. It was like God laying his hand on a person in the old times, the peace it brought to her, and the comfort. . . . It was like her own thought she was obeying, it came so natural. With the trust of a child in its mother, she watched him move his shoes and socks and tuck up the legs of his trousers. With the joy of a mother in her child, she gloried in the shape and colour of his legs, and in the strength of them. . . . It was the sure way he had of tying his shoes together by the lacers, letting them hang down in front of him from his neck. It was how he did everything well, the small things with the same care as the big.

"Now. One arm round my neck. Take the bag while we cross."

It's with the tenderness and strength that'd be on you, and you lifting a baby, that he carried her. If the content that was on her now, was on a baby every time it was carried, it's the happy life a child must lead. . . . The only fear that was on her, and it didn't hurt, was of opening her eyes and surprising in his the joy that was in her heart.

It's lost entirely they'd be, and the deep water on both sides of them, if they got lost in others' eyes, and his foot to slip. . . . Though, if it's

drowneded itself she was, and she in his arms, it's, maybe, to stay there she would, in the soul and spirit of her, through all eternity. . . . There was a great delight in that thought. It's happy she'd be if he took her safe across, and it's happier she'd be, maybe, if she was drowneded with him. . . . All the same, it's happiest of all she felt just where she was, the scent of his warm breath in her face, his heart pounding agin her like a threshing machine, his strong arms and hands touching her like velvet, his breast like a down pillow. And, all the while, between the strung-up nerves of him and her ear, and it tight agin his shoulder, there was crossing over and back a music never heard in the world before . . . his love and her own. . . . And it's to the same air the both of them was, and in the same key, so that she couldn't distinguish one from the other. . . . It's to wish that the stepping stones girded the world she did, and that they'd never end. . . .

Without a word he set her down, a great light in his eyes. Heedless he was in putting the socks on to his wet feet. When he took the bag from her again, and looked at her, with the whole world of a tale in his eyes, what else could she do but hang her head, and wait with wonder and thankfulness.

"You know I love you, Ann?"

"Isn't it my life?"

Not another word could she utter, the ocean of love there was on her. When she had the strength to look into his eyes, it's the same she saw there. Though she'd suffer anything at his hands, he didn't offer to lay a hand on her, or to kiss her, or anything. A sorrow was on her for it, maybe, for

a second. And it's the whimsical sad smile came on him at the sight of it. . . . It's, maybe, the cross side of Father John's face he was seeing now, just the same as herself, when, as you might say, right and wrong were blotted out of the world. She doubted if anything was wrong where love was. There wasn't anything wrong. Still, it was a queer thing, that the righter she felt within her, the more the law of God was agin her. Father John wouldn't put a twist in anything of his own account, but it's a twist there was somewhere in it, howsoever it got there. It's the groping look was in Brian's eyes too, just as if he was seeing the kink, and was trying to untwist it.

"Is it a twist of wrong in what's on us you're seeing?"

It's a great tenderness and perplexity came on him when she put him the question. But, from the clearness that came on him quickly, you could see that he had no doubt on himself, only for her.

"It's not then. But I was afeared something of the kind had come on you."

It was God's truth she saw in his eyes. All the same, she couldn't put Father John from her . . . peeping over Brian's shoulder he was, a frown on his face. And, no doubt, God was backing him up in it. If that'd go on, the day'd be spoilt for them. But, what call was there at all for anything to happen that'd rile God or the priest? And, just as if he knew what she was thinking, Brian said:

"Have no fear on you."

She couldn't help lifting his hand and kissing it, the kindness of him, and the way he answered her thought. . . . It's laughing like a child she was,

a great weight, and it, maybe, only a fancy, lifted off her. . . . It was a child she was again. And it's a child he was, the way he laughed with her.

“The world was made for us, and we're alone in it. There is no wrong and no right in it—nothing but beauty and love and laughter. This day, anyway, is our own.”

She could hug him for it: for the freedom and lightness of him, and the laugh in his voice. . . . It wouldn't be crossing the wall they had put between other, to catch hands like childre. . . . If he gripped her hand tight itself, like as if he never wanted to let her go, didn't she want him to, and didn't she grip him back. . . . She'd have a kiss off him, too, before the day was done, and let Father John whistle after it. The only doubt of God she had at all was on the letter of her marriage bond. And Brian had passed his word on that, no matter what weakness came on her. . . .

A great knowledge was in him of birds and the like, and trees. Of the birds that came in the spring, and ran off when the cold weather threatened. Of the birds that you loved the best, and they the gayest looking too, that stayed with you all the year. . . . Not a leaf or a grass but he could put a name on.

Songs, no end, he had. Songs that her grandfather hadn't; and they printed only in books that cost a power of money, as much as half a crown or three and six, no less, and they not in the broadsheets or the thruppenny song books at all. Songs about holy trees that'd fill you with wonder and love; and about speckled eggs that often looked as well, maybe, if not better, in the nest; the way some of them poets mistook them.

But Brian held that there was often a symbol, whatever that meant, in them, if you could only see it. A thing that'd help you to disregard the wrong markings. And, no doubt, the words were fine. But there was a bit about "ash leaves like little black fishes" that held her breath. It was only that morning she was groping for the right beauty of an ash leaf, but one of them great poets had found it already. It's lots of beauty there was straying unheeded around the world till the heart of a poet saw it. Then, after he had worked his will on it, it could never after be forgot. . . . And, if Brian himself hadn't made poems of his own, too! When she dragged them out of him by main strength and doggedness, it's how they near tore her heart with the beauty of them.

Full of him and of the colour of the woods her heart was, walking there beside him through the green lanes, and he swinging the bag as light as if it was only a pocket book. . . . Long spurts of silence or long spurts of talk were all one to them both, and their minds and their hearts full of other. . . . There was no need to look at anything but him. She could see everything in him. If she looked at the gold of a beech or the green of an ash or at a fir tree standing stark black agin a clump of all the colours of the dawn, it's only printing his beauty on her heart they were. He was all of them, and more. They only reminded her of what she saw in his eyes or in his step or in the turn of his head, or gave her some new aspect of him.

Like childre they were half the time, and they playing tig among the trees. In a way, it was an ease to her to have him hid from her for a minute,

so that she could draw her breath, and she near choked with the delight of him, and he under her eye. Not that there was any the less of him, and a bush or a tree between them. He was only different. Flooded with the memory of him she was, half a belief and half of hope on her, that he'd be something still more wonderful entirely when her eyes 'd find him again. . . . A hush on her heart like the hush in Father John's voice, and he turning the blessed bread into the Son of God Himself. . . . It was like that with her, he filled her soul. . . . Certain sure she was that she could see into the heart of the thing and fathom the truth of it.

At times they'd wander on, like two of them tourists you'd sometimes see walking Clasheen, and they talking things of the mind, without an eye at all for other or for the outer colour of the day . . . a great gravity on him, like he used to wear at a meeting or the like. It put pride on her that he talked with her as he would with an equal. And the wonder of it was that she was able to keep step with his talk, things rising up in her that she never guessed were in her. It's the great compliments he paid her, that she couldn't repeat even to herself, they'd make her so proud and vain. . . . But, sure, if there was anything in her that wasn't all him, it was how his love and his belief in her made her soul and her mind to grow and blossom.

The wisdom of him, and the heart of a child that went with it, could work any miracle in the girl that loved him.

It's to contrive accidents she used, to touch the sleeve of his coat or a curl at the back of his

head. And it's to feel a great holiness on her she did from it, like she used to feel at her monthly Communion, and Father John putting the body and blood of Christ Himself on her trembling tongue.

Would he pass by the turn to Raheen, or not? But, sure, he didn't. . . . A litany, as long as that holy terror that brought the sweat on Father John of a rogation day, and he striving to gallop through it, she'd have to make of the way Brian did his business. After all, there was many a thing to do in Raheen that Dan Lynskey had left undone; and it's to go through with it he did, as if it wasn't out for the day at all they were, but on business only. That was the mark of Brian in all his dealings. It was how love helped him instead of coming in his way, and he doing the work of the world.

She noticed the same in herself too. Another link it was in the chain, as long a ray of light from one of them stars, that bound them to other . . . every link of it an ocean of love, enough and to spare for the wants of a whole continent, though you'd be missing a single drop of it. . . . It was how love put the will on her to brighten a saucepan till she could see herself in it, or to make a cake, whether it was for him or no, that one'd as lief ate without butter as with it, it went down the throat with such a flavour of graciousness. And it was the same, and she sewing on a button or tending at a threshing. . . .

Still, it's ready enough he was to get out of the meal that was proffered them in Raheen. And it's the laugh of joy he gave when they were alone again; a carpet of beech leaves underneath

their feet, a roof of red gold above their heads, great columns of greeny grey stems on both sides of them. Like as if they were walking in one of them cathedrals you'd see in a picture book it was, only it was coloured by the hand of God, far finer than any man could do it. . . . A feel they both had, of being in a holy place.

It's there he kissed her. Their lips clung to other like as if they had found their home. . . . The world around them was all alive with their love. . . . It wasn't on the earth at all they stood, but before the throne of God. . . . It's as small and weak as a wren she felt, and as full of power and virtue as the great God Himself. . . . Birds that she hardly noticed through the morning, sang at the top of their voice, doing their best to tire down the birds that were singing in her heart. . . . But nothing in earth or heaven could equal that song in her heart. . . . Nothing ever brought her closer to God ; not His pardon of her first sin, nor her first communion. The kisses of her grandfather and Maurice were only the pale ghosts of it.

How they took their lips off other she didn't know. . . . But they found themselves out of the wood, walking quiet, a great content and gravity on them, before she began to notice much again. Like as if the soul of him had passed into her through his lips, and took some time to steady itself. . . . His strength was in her limbs and in her mind and in her heart.

A new world she was walking in. . . . For a month, the world had wore a face of beauty that she thought couldn't be beat . . . and all the morning, she felt she had gathered in her bosom

every drop of the finest essence of it. . . . What a fool she was ! and she not yet having hardly tasted love at all. . . . The sight of beauty didn't choke or blind her any more. . . . It was as if love had tuned up all her senses to it. . . . The very soul of beauty her love was now. And it put beauty into everything her eyes fell on. . . . A stone or a lump of dung on the ass track had beauty in it, and every bush in a gap. There was music in Brian's hobnails striking fire out of the outcrop of rock on their path. . . . It wasn't the outer cover of a bush, or of the sea and it meeting their view as they climbed the rise that she saw, but the colour and the glory and the shape it had in the mind of God. . . .

The world 'd never be the same to her again. For, with the light that was in her now, she saw the intention behind the deed : the pattern the weak things of the earth were striving to fashion themselves on, instead of the poor image they had made of themselves as yet. . . . It was the ugliness of things that used to hurt her most in times past, whether it was of the heart or of the mind ; but behind that now, she could see the beauty of God ; half covered by weeds maybe, or weakened or marred in one way or another, but with the light of God always flickering in it that never could be put out, no matter how spent it was.

'Twas then that he began to talk of love. . . . Walking uphill they were, with the hills on one side of them and the sea, like as if it was all lit up by their love, and it dancing and laughing, on the other. And in between them and the water, was another sea of colour in the woods they had

just left, only they had a dress on them far richer than what she noticed and they walking through them; red and russet and brown, and gold like you'd see on the head of a fair woman and the sun on it, and gold like you'd see above the edge of the world and the light going, and green of every hue: as if the grand cope, with the embroidery on it, that the nuns at Lismeedy made for Father John, was stretched out for miles and miles this way and that, the sun playing through it as well as on it.

But it was how she could see nothing at all now, except in the colour of her love. . . . 'Twasn't separate they were any more, whether he had a holt of her hand or not, but one. . . . It wasn't as a god outside her she saw him now. . . . It was like the joining together of the human and the divine nature in Jesus Christ Himself that Father John was always trying to explain. . . . It was how she understood that well now. . . . He was more of a man to her than ever, and she had all the more glory in her womanhood, but a divine spark had come on them both besides, that gave them, between them, a new nature, and fused them into a oneness, the pattern of which, may God forgive her, she could find only in the Son of God Himself.

It was how she couldn't open her mouth but he was thinking her thought; or mention a thing but he'd be beforehand with her in the image she hadn't half uttered. . . . The new light that shone out of everything, be it a stock or a stone or the woods or the sea, he saw with the same eyes as she did, for it lit up both their hearts alike.

Love, he said, was the wonder of God. . . . God

Himself and the world came of it. . . . Without the Holy Spirit of love God wouldn't be God at all, and the world, if it ever existed, 'd be without form. . . . It was love, or the marring of it, that made and unmade everything, from the dust beneath your feet to the farthest star in the high heavens. . . . Love was in the crystals of a rock and in every flower that grew. . . . It made the song of a bird. . . . With it, in its fulness, man was God; and without it he was nothing, even though he'd have all the other gifts of heaven for his portion. . . . And love wasn't the flesh alone, or the spirit alone, but the perfect union of them both. . . . Long ago, the poets, who always saw first into the heart of a thing, saw the truth clear. . . . But all men didn't see it then, or even now; or they wouldn't let themselves see it. . . .

A queer mess the world was in, from men seeing only in a glass darkly . . . the bitter glass, made by the devils, and God asleep, as a great poet sang. . . . If men and women kept their eyes fixed only on the holy tree, and not on a slated roof or a purse of sovereigns, or this or that high estate or foolishness, they'd always find their mate, and make heaven for themselves. . . . A castle, or a throne itself, was useless to a man and a woman unless they found in it the holy tree of love. . . . It was how men and women were wandering about the world only half born, their flesh and their spirit incomplete, until they found their perfect fit. . . . Many got tired of the search, or impatient, or set up idols for themselves; and, though they built empires for themselves, they were only clauber on the earth in the eyes of time and God. . . . But it's the bells of heaven rang out for the birth of

a new god when two straying souls, that in themselves were nothing, saw in the eyes of other not only the answer of their flesh but the answer of their souls.

With that, he moved a bush in a gap, and they stood together on the round of the hill. And down in the vale underneath them, and in Bruagh hill over against them, they saw what left them without a word. . . . Their hands moved together, but it was only to have some hold on the flesh that was melting off them under the beauty of the sight. . . . It was their love that stood revealed to them. . . . all the beauty of the heart of God stretched out before their eyes. . . . One with it all, they were . . .

How long they stood there, and when they sat down, and how long they stayed, she didn't know. . . . Whether it was the green water talking to her, or his voice, or the voice of God, or only her love whispering to her, she didn't know. . . . Only, sometimes, she'd put out her hand and feel his face or his hair, and it's the feel of the love of God they had. . . . And whether it was the wind, or him saying again the poem he said on the way up, or the water, or God, or the love in her own heart, or only her blood singing in her, she heard as clear as the day :

“ Beloved, gaze in thine own heart,
The holy tree is growing there ;
From joy the holy branches start,
And all the trembling flowers they bear.”

PART III—THE BITTER GLASS

FIRST CHAPTER

THE very look of the gate brought an ache of joy to her. A wonder it was that her heart could hold any more, and it brimming over, fifty times already in the one day.

That was the kind of thing love was. She could be as full as she could hold of it, and the next minute she could add another heartful, and still hold it all. Each time she was near swept away by the great waves of it; but, somehow or another, she always held her feet.

It wasn't outside her at all the moon was now, or the stars, or the poplars, and they whispering love to her. . . . If they were outside of her, it was by some trick of a photograph or the like, and they only poor images of the beauty swimming about within in her. It was like as if she made any beauty they had in them, just by looking at them.

Brian said that he could see all the beauty of the world in her eyes. And, sure, she could well believe him; and he only getting back his own image out of her. The Blessed Virgin must have felt something the same, and she carrying God within her. . . . Hardly human at all she felt, but like as if she was fashioned of some heavenly stuff that could think grand thoughts and feel joy and hear music in every square inch of her, the same as the saints, maybe, in heaven.

She wouldn't go in to the house yet, with all this on her. . . . Sorry now she was that she hurried Brian off, for fear of the Kerrigans being gone to bed . . . though it's glad she was to be alone, so that she could enjoy the fulness of him.

It's to lose all count of time they did, and he having no watch on him. . . . Only an invention of the devil that same time was, no truth at all in it. Wasn't every minute of the day, it had so much to it, like a million years? And, no sooner was that thought on her, but she had to admit that the whole day flew by in a second. Hadn't she lived her whole life through, a hundred times, in every change of look in his eyes?

It was how the house seemed strange to her, and she so long away from it. . . . Peggy's cross voice, and it piercing the night, through the deal door and all, had no more meaning than one of them owls calling out of nowhere. . . . Maybe it's years and years she was wandering about with Brian, she seeing only the light of his eyes; when, maybe, the light and the dark had been following other, and the sun giving way to the stars? It was no count of anything she had, but the colour of the down on his neck or the like; and the feel his voice had, and it speaking to her blood.

It was all a mystery, like God and the Blessed Trinity. The more you poked into it the farther it shied off from you. . . . But sure Brian wasn't like that at all. And her own mind was as clear as a bell. It's very near the understanding of the great God she had. If Brian wasn't the knowledge of God no man was, the way he laid the whole world bare. And, as for his love, the longest plummet ever dropped into the sea couldn't reach

the depths of it. Whether it was big or little her own soul was, there was no separating it now from his. Wasn't it all one, when you were joined up with the sea, whether you were the Shannon or only the little streameen down by Duncorrig? For it's to feel bigger than the ocean she did, bigger than God, may the Lord save her for thinking the like, with the fathomless love that was on her.

With all that on her, and she walking the stars like one'd step from a tussock of grass to another in a bog, it's the cuteness of a weasel she had. Sorra give in to Brian she would, on the soreness of her foot, or the ache that was often in her back, or the stitch in her side, and they only the devil envying the joy that was on her. It's to walk on for ever she could, and every bone in her body aching, so long as he was beside her. Half the time, if the truth was told, not knowing whether it was walking or sitting she was, or travelling the air like the song of a bird.

It was how she was determined to see, with him beside her, all the things that used to bring the colour of love, and dreams of it, to her, and she a girl. . . . Half afeared she was, that they'd be nothing at all now, after the glory of Bruagh glen. It's little she knew of the power of love. It's all and more than she saw in Bruagh, she could see in the bark of a beech tree on her way back. For the colour of Bruagh 'd never leave her eyes again; and everything she saw now, down to the dead leaves under her foot, had all of Bruagh in them, and a new wonder of beauty of their own besides.

From the top of Knockbrack, and he standing beside her, his sleeve touching her hand, she saw him walking the flaming sea, a beauty on him that

blinded her. When her soul rushed out to him, and he kissing her lips, it was to think of the Holy Ghost she did, and not of a man at all. As her lids fell apart again, and she weak with her joy, it's to look on God she did, the glory that was in Brian's eyes, and the gold of the sun dyeing his head.

Everywhere she took him after, it was all the beauty of the world was always in front of her eyes. Like in one of them tubes you'd buy at a fair, that'd be changing its colour and shape every time you turned it. Only, instead of pieces of glass, it's the grandest jewels that ever hung on a queen she saw, and all the love that ever shone in the eyes of the purtiest women, fair and dark, from Deirdre herself to Nance Farrell. There was a colour on the hedges, and on the grass, and in the shadow of a tree, that she hadn't believed it was in the power of God to make.

Where the dark came on them, or when, she didn't know. Since the light was dark and the dark light, with the beauty of the heart on everything. . . .

Though, from the feel of care in his voice, and they crossing the high path through the bog, she knew that the night was on them. What a fool of a boy he was to bother about the like, and the thought of him making the air in front of her dance with all the lights of heaven!

It was how the chapel was shut when they got there. But sure the whole world knew where Jamesy Curtin kept the key hid under the doorstep. . . . It's the feeling of walking in the love of God she had, the minute they crossed the threshold . . . a comfort and a blessing in the air around

her, like as if God was cuddling her to His breast. . . . Not till her dying day would she forget all that wonder of the House of God. A few minutes they were in it, or, maybe, an eternity of time. The little red light before the altar threw a welcome from God on them. The gold stars in the ceiling, were the eyes of the angels and saints smiling down on them. Though they couldn't see God Himself, and He hid behind the gold door of the tabernacle, sure the both of them felt the warmth of His blessing, the very smell of the divine love in it. . . . And, if any, it was Brian felt it the most, though he was no great hand at the believing or the like. It was how love made a god of you, he said. . . . But, sure, she had no need for him to tell her what she knew well. . . . And when they lit a couple of candles in front of the Virgin's altar, the way she smiled down on them was near past believing and long beyond the power of telling . . . as much as to say "my blessing on ye" . . . a mixture it was of the love of a happy wife and a happy mother, a spice of the eager hope and wonder of a great lover in it. And, moreover, a tenderness and understanding that only the Mother of God herself could have a large enough heart for.

It was how the tears stood in the eyes of the both of them, and they at the limit of their love. . . . When he laid his hand on her it's to know for certain, just as if she was God Himself, with all the depth of the wisdom of love on her besides, that Brian was her mate from the beginning of time; and that God or devil or the whole world of men, or death itself, could never put between them. . . . And though it's near choked with love she was, she made an effort to say the thought in the hearing

of God and His Blessed Mother. And it was how Brian kissed her there and then in the sight of them both. In the touch of his lips all the love of her body and soul was joined for ever with his. . . . All the joy of the height of love on her, together with a feeling of the same purity that you'd see in the eyes of the Mother of God. Looking into her own heart she was, Brian said, and he hardly able to speak, seeing the holy tree that was growing there, the like of which never grew and blossomed in the world before. . . .

Only for the gate she had her hands on, it's hardly to believe she could that she was in the world at all, and all them memories on her. . . . How they danced other down, and they hardly knowing whether it was standing on their heads or their heels they were, at Duggan's Cross, where they had first set eyes on other ; the moon herself smiling covetously at them, envying them their world of happiness.

Good God ! What was that creak in her heart ? For a second of time, she thought it was one of them devils in the song, holding up the bitter glass in front of her, and it only the noise of a latch of the door !

If that wasn't Peggy, all the blackness of a witch of hell on her, and she in the shadow of the moon, peering out at her.

Well, she'd have to go in some time. . . . Whether it was near morning, or only ten at night, or whatever time it was, it wasn't an ordinary common day only that had been in it for them, but the whole of time, past, present and to come, and all the love that ever was made or dreamt of, and every song of the heart that lifted you over

the roof of the world, giving you the freedom of God and the stars themselves for a creep.

“Is it afeared to come in you are, you whore, you?”

She couldn't help the laughing that came on her . . . to be read like that, and she thinking she had a crown of white beauty on her, like you'd see in a riband of gold round a saint's head in a holy picture, the meaning of which the most withered heart 'd understand at sight.

“Wait till I fasten the gate. What's on you at all, Peggy, to be saying the like? What time is it at all?”

“It's the brazen hussy you are! What did I always say? Just as if butter wouldn't melt in your mouth! Is it ten minutes to three in the morning? Tell me that. At the long last, Joe has come to his senses about you. It's to account for yourself you'll have to, before you lay a head on your bed this night. Though it'll shame decent ears to listen to you itself. And out of the door, neck and crop, I pray to God Joe 'll kick you when you're done.”

“You spawn of hell, you! Will you be off to bed with yourself, and not be blackening the night.”

The heart began to beat even in her again. It's the dirty mind Peggy had, but she'd feel for many a long day the weight of that push Joe gave her; and more, the great anger that was on him for her words. . . . It was the good in Joe showing, she knowing it was in him but hardly ever seeing it. . . . A great mixture of tenderness and hate was on him for her as he made way for her to pass in.

It was how the whole place shone with comfort

the big fire there was on the hearth. Only a grey ghost the lamp in the window was, the way the great red flames on the hearth lit up the house, making the smoked fitches on the rafters throw a glow of welcome at her, and the brass candlesticks and the lustre jugs flush red. The ashes were swept up, and the floor had a clean shine on it, just as if it was ready for Father John himself, and he coming with the great God in his breast pocket.

For a minute it wasn't Joe's black looks she minded, nor the blazing hate of Peggy, her anger for once overtopping any check of Joe or any respect she might have for him. It was how she felt for the first time, in the heat that burnt her cheeks, the cold she had stepped in out of. . . . Outside the door the heat of her heart, likely, kept her from feeling the frost that was in the air; while the cold draught of anger she met coming in must have froze her, enough anyway, to be glad of the fire. . . . Like a child she put out her hands to it, a stray thought on her that the Kerrigans 'd have no fire to greet Brian, and he coming in cold.

"What else 'd a woman be doing with a man at this hour of the night?"

There was a dint of savage anger in Peggy's voice that struck home like the swish of an ash plant, a hiss of glee in it. . . . A sort of empty hole it made in her heart. A word she couldn't utter in her defence. . . . A horror on her that anyone 'd say the like . . . and a queer, glad feeling that it was said about her . . . as if there was a blind longing on her flesh that what Peggy thought might be true.

A feeling of peace came on her, like the comfort she'd have and she lying in a pleasant tiredness on

a soft bed, the sun shining in on her, and there no call at all on her to get up. . . . She could know that the air around her was full of anger and hate. But it couldn't hurt her. For no feeling of it came next or nigh her, the way she was wrapt round with love. . . . Burning out of her it was : like the rays of light a saint 'd see round the Blessed Virgin in a miracle, at Knock maybe, or that French place that you couldn't pronounce, the way the name of it fought agin the tongue.

Then, across the long silence Joe gave a laugh that pierced her heart . . . the wail of a lost soul that was in it. Not a word did he utter, but she could read the thought in him as plain as print. A great pity was on her for him . . . like the pity you'd have for a stranger, and you not able to help him. Though your heart 'd be tore with the desire of it itself. Or, like the good God must have for a sinner.

Thinking of the nights he was, likely, that passed with the slowness of a funeral and they lying side by side, with nothing but the blackness of despair between them. . . . There was an ache of pity on her for him ; but it's more paralysed she was than ever in any power to ease him. She could feel his pain in a way she never felt it before, a great understanding of love on her. But it'd be only to torture him the more she would, by showing him her pity. Her love he wanted, but it's more of a stone statue than ever he was to her, in regard to that. Her pity wouldn't even be a bone to a dog. It'd hurt him more than if you proffered sympathy to a starving man, instead of the bread and meat your house was full of to the overflow.

“Laugh, do, at the dirty tripe. And the whole world laughing at you.”

Like a mad woman Peggy was, a snarl of devilish joy on her. But it was only black hate of her she brought into Joe's eyes. He ground his teeth and swallowed as if he was choking :

“Hell isn't hot enough——”

He stopped short, like as if he forgot Peggy altogether, a glazed look in his eyes. He clawed the air with his hands, as if the earth was slipping from him. Then, with the suddenness of a cat making a jump, he was towering over herself, the eyes bursting out of his head, his hands opening and shutting, like when they near froze the heart in her once, and he choking a rabbit.

“It's to break every bone in your body I could . . . tear you limb from . . . sizzle you . . . damn . . . damn——”

Just as if you threw a bucket of water on him, all the stuffing fell out of him, and it's like a cowed dog he looked. He sank into Peggy's chair, and the sobs racked his breast, like you'd see long rolls of earth thrown up by the plough. A moan in every one of them, like a mother crying her dead, the sound being more in the shiver of his breast than in anything you'd actually hear. . . . She had no power in her to move and help him. . . . No fear at all was on her of him, even when his fingers were twitching for her throat. . . . Only a greater pity than ever.

It's glad she was when Peggy, love brightening up her withered face and making her nearly human, petted him and coaxed him. Not but her look of love could pass at once to hate, the second her eyes fell on herself. Though there was little of glee

mixed with her hate now. After a while Peggy was able to draw a word out of him . . . about the price of oats it was. And they meandered back and forth, through separated milk and pigs, to how Yorkshire Fog was crowding out the good grasses of the meadow.

With the toleration that was on her now she could enjoy the craft of one Dunne getting the better of the other: Joe taking control of the talk when he had gained mastery over his black fit. And he, all the time, edging Peggy off to bed. . . . His quietness meant nothing at all. Anger was still on him. The injured vanity of the man had passed from him only to the sight, held in check within him by the stubborn self-complacency of the Dunnes. But, once he got rid of Peggy, it's through a catechism he'd put herself yet, and, maybe, try the sultan over her. . . . He was so much outside her now that even that thought couldn't hurt her.

It was how it made her like a rock, love did. And, no matter how angry the waves of hate beat agin her, it's to wash back off her, harmless, they had to, leaving her with a fresh smile on her face. . . . Peggy's angry hate and Joe's glumness hardly threw a shadow, the size of her fist, on the light that was in her.

There, at the back of the fire, was Brian's face shining out at her. Peace was in it and. . . . What was that word of Felix Doherty's for notes running this way and that agin other in the music, and the joining together of them, so as to pierce your heart, just as if they were one from the beginning of time? Them big words had little hold on her memory. . . . Harmony, it was.

But, sure, if the word escaped her itself it's well she knew what it meant. Didn't she often feel it at the threshings . . . when the whirr of the machine, and the voice of a lark, and the laughing and talk around her, and the ground-swell below on the strand, made music, like you'd hear a nun playing on the organ of an evening within in the convent chapel in Lismeedy. . . . It's how she knew then what God had in His mind, when He made the world . . . what marriage was meant to be. . . . It's many a tiff there could be in it ; and differences over this and that, big and little. But sure it's love could make the completer music out of life for a trifle of discord here and there in it, if only the right twist was in the souls for love to work on. . . . Every line of the face in front of her, and of the soul of Brian that she saw behind it, had some answering note in her mind and heart. . . . It's like the image of the rowan tree in the pool she was . . . every leaf and berry of him she could laugh back at him from the depths of herself. . . . And if it was mounting herself on the top of a steeple of pride she was itself, there was no vanity in it, for whatever was in her Brian planted there. . . . And, oh God ! no nun that ever drew music out of herself could play the tune of that thought ! of him sitting opposite to her there on the hob ! The very thought of it made a whole High Mass of music play itself in her blood. . . . The only doubt in her mind was whether a sinner while on the earth could have leave to enjoy all the happiness of God.

“ If you don't go up out of that, Peggy, it's to fall asleep on your feet you will.”

A full mastery of himself was on Joe now. And

Peggy 'd take the hint of his frown and his wink. They could wink and frown till the day of judgment for all she'd bother about them. The look that Peggy gave her had all the evil will of a devil in it, but it wore off swift enough when she turned her eyes on Joe.

“ Won't you take the good advice of your aunt, agra ? ”

It's to believe it wasn't the same Peggy at all was in it you would. The very tone of love itself was in her voice. But it only put the anger again on Joe, and he glared at her as if he hated her.

“ Is it to tear the heart out of myself you'd have me ? It's only black hate you have in you and no sense and insight.”

It near stopped her breath, to watch the storm of passion in Peggy's face. Love and hate fighting other in the furrows of it and in the black fires of her eyes. Like the struggle between heaven and hell in the old poem of her grandfather's, or like God and the devil fighting for a soul in “ Hell opened to Christians.”

Sympathy rose up in her for the woman. . . . It's to know there was great love on her you would . . . for Joe only ; barbs of hate around it for the whole world beside, the bitterness that was on her.

Good God ! it was the queer world it was. And all the feeling Joe had for Peggy was that she saved him a few shillings here and there. . . . Poor Peggy ! to live all her life with the like of that of love of a stunted mother banked down in her heart ! It's a pity you'd have for her even if she hated you ten times worse than she did. . . . And to be able to go the length of wanting you to

have another child. . . . The gall and wormwood it must be to her aching childless heart to see the room door close on them of a night. . . . The pain of the waste of love that must be on her. . . . It was near past the power of God to prevent crusts of hate growing round a love like that. . . . A hero the woman was, if hate grew as black as hell in her heart itself, and her mind and tongue were as foul as the devil's cess-pool.

It's leaning with weakness agin the ladder leading up to the loft Peggy was now, a woman no one ever saw bend before, all the sorrows of the world in her eyes, just as if her love and her hate had spent themselves out. . . . And Joe was motioning her up the ladder with all the blindness of a bat on him. . . . Respect she bred in you, blighted wind-blast and all though she was. . . . It's, maybe, one of them beeches towering to heaven, holding all the colour of love in their wide arms, she'd be, if only she had found her mate. . . . And it's grander than any beech she looked this minute, with the same sort of look in her eyes, and they fixed on Joe, that she'd have for little Bessie. . . . And, honest to God, if she didn't throw herself the first look, without hate in it, that she had ever cast on her. There was no love in it. Peggy was never the one to pretend. It was the look with which you'd take a sorrow you didn't deserve from the hands of God, or a scolding for something you didn't do.

Whatever queer hope Peggy cherished in her heart out of this night, had passed from her. The cross she had struck against for many a year, she took on her now with the meekness of Christ Himself. And it all because the man she wasted

her heart on, for the first time in his life, and, in selfish innocence only no doubt, had treated her as dirt underneath his feet. . . . Thank God, that wasn't one of the mysteries of love she'd have to plumb. . . .

"Be off up with you out of that or you'll outsleep the milking."

Peggy was dazed for a few seconds by the rough hardness of the voice Joe threw at her. But she soon turned to go, with the gait of a beaten dog, a sort of grateful pain in her eyes for the hand that struck her.

And, if she didn't stop short on the first step of the ladder, and give herself the first smile she ever gave her without a sneer in it. It was like as if the understanding of love had passed into Peggy too. There was neither love nor hate in the look, nor friendliness even. But it was as much as to say "we understand other. Let us live and let live." . . . And, before God, as she watched her walk up the ladder, the straightness and pride of a bulrush on her, love grew in her own heart at every step Peggy took, for a woman who kept a spark of God alive in her under a worse misfortune than any devil could invent.

And all that Joe saw of it was the relief of having her gone, and he giving a sigh, almost of contentment. . . . In a flash of her heart she saw it all.

"Was it to turn me out of the house she wanted you to?"

"Who told you that?"

"The same God that drove her to it. No matter what blindness besides was on her."

It's to stare at her stupid he did, anger growing in him because he couldn't follow her thought.

. . . Then, almost smothering his anger, a look of cuteness and caution came on him :

“ She’s worth a great deal to us. Don’t say or do anything to hurt her, for fear she might leave us.”

If it was to her death she was going she’d have to laugh at him. Like beating on a burst drum it was to talk to him. Laughing at himself, he knew she was, but the vanity of him tried to hide his anger under cover of Peggy.

“ It’s worth ten of you she is.”

Respect for the woman sobered her and she had to say :

“ It’s worth a great deal she is. There’s more than the beginning of love on me for her, after this night.”

He stared at her, his jaw hanging, dumb-founded. And then, all of a sudden, anger arose in him to a blind fury. Only for the space between them it’s to strike her he would.

“ It’s you, you bitch, that has turned the both of us mad.”

It’s scarcely to touch her at all the taunt did, let alone soil her. And, no doubt, without her knowing it, it’s to show her happiness she did, and the love and pride that was on her.

“ It’s hardly to keep my hands off you I can . . . a smile on you like a whore ! ”

The fury of the man made his face like a devil. But, in a second of time, she could see the honesty of him struggling with his passion. Soon, it’s the lost look of a man searching out his way in the pitch dark he had on him. There was suspicion and fierce doubting and heartbreak on him, and a great anger, fighting with a wish to be fair to her.

It's the strong desire to be gentle to him she had. She couldn't help but to cross over to him and lay her hand in kindness on his arm. It's to sink into the chair he did under her touch, a sort of bewilderment of weakness upon him. Across his face swept waves of anger agin her, and desire of her and doubts of her, that he tried hard to keep back. Then he made a desperate attempt at a laugh that near made her cry :

"It's Peggy said the damned'st things about you . . . and she not meaning them. It's to choke her I near did."

It's an empty hollow sound his words had, the doubt and the dread that was in them. Every one of them a question of which he was more than half afeared to hear the answer.

A depth of pity she had on her for him, and he looking at her like a dumb dog. Shook to the marrow she was in the wish to ease him. That minute she'd do anything in her power to help him. If there was any love in her for him his look 'd drag it out of her. . . . But it was only knocking at a locked door he was, and she having no power in her to open it.

She couldn't rightly say how she felt. . . . Like two women she was, and in front of her eyes were two men. . . . She was burning with love in the flesh and in the spirit, set afire by the man who was towering there above Joe, just as solid as if he wasn't, likely, miles away. While in the same instant of time her flesh and the soul of love within her, was crusted in ice as far as it had to do with Joe. . . . And, all the time, she had another kind of feeling for him, that made her want to kiss the pain off his face. Only it's the knowledge she had

clear in her, that what she could do for him, 'd be no comfort at all to him . . . likely to kill the last flutter of hope in him it would. Though, maybe, that'd be her greatest kindness to him? She didn't know what to do or to say. But she'd have to try to be as straight in her mind as in her love. They might as well have it out now as another time. Her heart 'd be sure to guide her tongue to what was right and fair.

“What did she say at all?”

There was a dryness on her voice, but no fear at all on her for herself, only for him, the way she knew he was feeling.

“Nothing, nothing at all.”

She could see the fear that was on him in the pause he made, and the way his eyes darted about, afeared to look long at any one thing, frightened that he'd see in it something he half expected to see but still hoped wasn't there.

“This and that . . . a neighbour coming in with a tale. . . . Ye were seen at Brinney . . . and one said it's a holt of your hand he had. . . . Your mother. . . . May God forgive the woman. . . . A pack of liars the whole of them! Say it wasn't true?”

Deep down he moved her, like as if, for once, he stood on the threshold of her love. She even had the feeling that, if years back he had looked at her like that, with as much as that nine-tenth of belief and trust in her in his eyes, she'd have been shook to the depths. But, now, instead of sweeping her off her feet, he had only the power to move her thoughts and her pity. Great kindness was on her for him. It made her voice tremble, and she saying that she'd sit down and they'd talk it out.

With that, she could see his old belief in himself coming back, just as if the whole world went round to his will. She couldn't say but she hardened a bit agin him.

"Move off the creepy and take the other chair. I'll throttle Peggy for the insult she put on me. As if you could treat me like that? And bring dishonour on the name of Dunne that has always stood fair before the world?"

It was very near all of the old Joe was back now . . . only the least taste of doubt and fear on him. She'd never forget on his behalf, the glimpse she saw of the fine side of him. But it'd be easier to say the things that'd have to be said to the Joe stuffed with pride that she knew the best, than to the natural man she seldom saw. His anger 'd be easier to bear than any softness in him. Rising in him it was already over her delay.

"Why don't you answer me? Say there was no truth in it. Though it's to see I will anyway, that you give me an account of why you stayed out of the house till three o'clock in the morning?"

It's the temptation she had to laugh out at him. But the foolishness of the man made her pity him the more, the fall she'd have to give him. It was how she drove all the kindness she could into her voice:

"It's true . . . every word of it. I don't know all you heard. But what you said was true . . . and more."

It's the face of a maniac he had on him. His fist beat the arm of the chair with a strength that half called him back to himself. Nursing his hand with fury, he shouted, in a voice to pierce the roof:

"You aren't his——" He stopped on the word,

but she could see it on his writhing lips, and written in fire on his eyes.

“ No. Not that . . . yet, anyway. It’s hardly to think of him at all I did that way, and it such a small part of the love I have for him. . . . But there was no limit at all on the desire of my soul.”

It’s to think she did that he was going to strangle her. He threw the chair he was sitting on from him, with such a force that she could hear the legs of it shrieking through the house, the sort of noise they made and they cracking. He put the full weight of his hands on her like as if he wanted to break her neck. But it was how he only crushed her shoulder blades instead of her spine. But for the weight of her ribs on her breathing, and a soreness about the chest, there was nothing on her. Only that she noticed things with the clearness they said people ’d have and death on them: the veins standing out on him, his tongue hanging thick like a tired dog’s, and a blend of hate and desire on him that’d near give her a turn if there was any feeling at all left in her.

With that Bessie cried out, in a wail that’d waken the dead, and she disturbed likely by his shout, or by the noise of the chair.

Though there was no fear of death on her up to that, it’s the great fear of it came on her now. She struggled to free herself; but there was nothing to struggle against, for his hands fell from her like as if she burnt him. Nothing stood in her way as she snatched up the lamp and darted to the room door.

But it’s sleeping quiet Bessie was, as if there wasn’t a care on the world, a smile on her as tender as love itself. . . .

To pierce her all of a sudden with a queer feeling the child did, and it near the first time she gave a thought to her the whole day. . . . It was the first cloud that had come on her happiness. She tried to shove it from her by kissing the child, but it stuck in her mind. It didn't lessen the light any, but there was a great disturbance in it. . . . Tucking in the clothes round Bessie and smoothing her pillow didn't rid her of the ache. Though the child's smile 'd make you think she was blessing you, she not even dreaming of blaming you for your neglect.

The cold look of the dawn the kitchen had when she faced it again. Like a solid block Joe stood out in the grey murk, the fire near spent behind him. A hard look of satisfaction was on him, in so far as she could make out his face at all, and it high up beyond what little light there was, hid in dark shadows. The wind had got up without, and was whistling an icy blast between the back door and the front. With a roar down the chimney, it sent a gust of ashes from the hearth fair into her face. It was a troubled sound the world had surely. She could think of nothing but to blow out the lamp in her hand, and it flaming wild. With that, she saw Joe better. Sobered down to bitterness and hardness he was, the twist in his jaw showing that his mind was made up . . . by the light of reason, he'd boast. Though it'd take Solomon himself to see a drift of wisdom in him and he in that sort of a mood.

"Better leave Peggy have her sleep out, and do you do the milking."

"There's sense in that."

"Damme! Is that the tone you talk to me in,

and me willing to pass over the insult you put on me and my name ? ”

“ I couldn't put insult on anyone or anything, and I only putting glory on God.”

It was how the light that was in her heart, at the sound of his words, lit up the whole world with its grandeur ; and Joe and all the rest of the race of men, but one, were blotted out in the flame of it.

“ Blast you. It's grovelling on the floor at my feet you ought to be if you have any feeling in you, with a jute sack on you, and ashes on your forehead.”

“ It's sitting at the right hand of God I am, with all the love there is in my heart.”

It was how the words came out of her without any thought at all, with the ease of the clergy singing across the chapel at other at a high mass or the like ; the same feeling in her that she'd have, and she on her knees before God on the altar. Joe was only an empty voice to her, the glory and pride that was on her.

“ It's the devil is in you. Or is it for the mad-house you're heading ? Am I mad myself or only a fool, and me not thrashing you with the broom ? Down on your knees before me there, you slut, or I'll be tempted to lay my hands again on you.”

Some part of her must have been attending to his words ; for it's a queer thought she had, that it was like the whistling wind he was, and just as harmless. She had a glimmer of a notion, too, of the anger that was on him, and that there was some sort of right on him . . . like as if he was laying down the law of the earth, with some justice in him, to a soul that had escaped out of it.

But she was more bothered by the lamp she

held in her hand ; and she wasn't fully herself till she laid it down in its place on the window shelf, and was able to watch, without hamper, the colour her heart threw on the morning sky. Was it the wind or the loud foolishness of Joe that gave it that half angry looking beauty ? Anyway, ragged and all as it was with windy clouds, it reminded her of the colour of her love. . . .

Dragging her round by the hair of her head he was. . . . But he couldn't take the colour of her love from her ; for it followed everywhere her eyes struck. . . . It made her understand Joe and forgive him the pin-head of pain he put on her, and it shining on his distorted face when he slewed her round and threw her from him.

It must be the glory on her that sobered him all of a sudden. For the first time in his life, after having made up his mind about a thing, he was doubting himself. . . . The first glimmer he ever had of not knowing her in and out, was on his face now. . . . The thought and the tongue were both hindering him. Like as if he saw something through a fog ; or else saw something clear enough, that he couldn't bring himself to believe in. When he tried to utter, his lips wouldn't answer to his will. You could know from his look, that it was his conceit of himself coming between him and some scattered vision of the truth. . . . At last he drove himself under. White about the gills he was ; and he had to wet his lips several times with his tongue before he could speak :

“ It's not false to your God you'd be, and leave me ? ”

She heeded that fully enough, and she watching close to see what 'd come out of his bothered mind.

It was how it struck her as a mixed-up kind of saying with little or no point in it. It wasn't looking for reasons, however, she was to-day, and the truth stamped on her heart. When she spoke it was the image of God in her that formed the words:

“My love is God in me.”

He could say nothing but stare at her like as if she was a mad woman. Out of pity for the bewilderment of ignorance that was on him she tried to explain herself, and she only a poor hand at the like:

“I couldn't be false to my God in following the light He put in my heart with His own hand. I wasn't thinking of leaving you or not leaving you. Before God, I hardly thought about you at all. There's too much love on me to think of anything else but it—yet, anyway.”

But, as if to give her the lie, another wail from Bessie struck her heart. She stood her ground for a minute under the depth of pain it gave her. When she had collected herself enough to move, Joe, and he nearer to the room door, was before her at it. She stayed where she was, a trembling on her that she couldn't understand.

The light in her heart failed her in the fog that came on her and she listening. . . . It's wide awake Bessie was now, with a gurgle of whiny talk on her. After a minute, through Joe putting laugh-talk on her, as if he hadn't a care in the world, the child had sleep again in her answering laughs. Very soon there was silence in the room except for the wind and it near drowning the cradle song Joe was humming low.

While she waited him it was like as if some one held up in front of her the old looking-glass she

used to have in her room at home, all black and speckled, for her to read herself in. . . . Or was it that bitter glass the great poet wrote the song about? Of Bessie she was thinking, and the hole she had burrowed in her heart . . . and in Joe's heart too. . . .

The love that was on her was her life. . . . She could feel that with the certainty of heaven. . . . There was Brian again for a minute, the light of him driving all the shadows off the glass. . . . All of a sudden he faded away. And there was the old glass again, with a long row of questions written in fire across it. . . . Her heart told her to take her eyes off them and that they'd answer themselves. But her mind was bothered. She couldn't get out of her head the memory of the give and take of laughing between Joe and the child, with love of other in the voices of them both.

The kitchen wall danced up and down in front of her, this image and that mocking her from it. . . . She couldn't be sure for a few seconds, whether it was a devil or Joe was mocking her from the room door. But 'twas Joe right enough, with a sly smile on him. She never saw the like on his face before, and it not without some sort of kind feeling in it for herself.

"Aren't you gone out yet to milk the cows?"

If it wasn't sarcastic his voice was, a sort of bitter triumph in it! And an air of sureness, you'd nearly say of command, about him. Without hardly intending it she went towards the milk pail, her mind in a muss.

"And, for fear I'd forget it again. You'll resign at once from off that committee."

That woke her up anyway. The clear light was

in front of her eyes again, and the truth of God in her heart.

“ I will not then.”

It's to laugh he did, with a mock on him that'd anger the dead. But God was standing by her, and the mock flowed off her like water off a duck's back.

The movement, and it a holy thing in itself, couldn't be separated in her mind from Brian. It was as impossible to give up the one as the other. . . .

The smile she gave Joe drove him into a fury, in spite of the control he had gained over himself and he in the room with Bessie. Whatever plan he had made there, the old wavering light was in his eyes again. He clenched his hands and his eyes fired up wilder than ever. He tried to hold himself in by locking his teeth hard, but the words burst out of him in spite of himself :

“ It's the way you tempt me to hate you, you unnatural woman you. Don't make me think the worst of you, and I trying to keep the thought from me. It's degradation enough you've already brought on me, without dragging me through the mud entirely. But, by God, I'll stop your gallop if I had to tie you up to the leg of the bed within there in the room.”

It's mistook she was in thinking there was any greatness in him. Back again he fell into a big empty figure of a man, only a small soul in hiding in him, selfish vanity written all over the outer cover of him.

It's as little feeling she had for him that minute as she had for the water she was rinsing the pail with. And it's just as much outside her he was

as the water, and she emptying it into the bucket. Straight from her heart she spoke to him :

“It’s my body, maybe, you could spancel and you having the strength of a bull in you—at least till the world cried shame on you. But the soul of me, and you never catching even a glimpse of it in all your born days, you have no power in you to lay a hand on, much less to hold.”

It’s all the fury of a weak-minded man was on him now. He kicked the tin can from out of her hand. The clatter of it along the floor, and agin the side of the dresser, set Bessie screeching, and shook Peggy from out of her bed.

“What in the name of God is up ?” Peggy cried loud, standing at the top of the ladder in her shift.

But it’s little heed she could give to Peggy, or to Bessie even, and she roaring worse than ever, the look of fury and hate and cunning that was on Joe’s face :

“Then it’s to trail you in the mud I will. And it’s Bessie within will reap for me my full crop of vengeance off you.”

With that all the strength went out of him, and he leant like a sick man agin the room door, with his old gaze of a dumb dog on her.

And, sure as God, it was like as if it was seeing them all in that bitter glass she was . . . a great blankness on her mind . . . Peggy, like an accusing angel of the devil in her white shift, standing stiff, with her hand lifted, half way down the ladder . . . Bessie, through the shut door and all, laughing happy and calling Joe . . . herself, pity on her again for Joe’s weakness, soothing his damp forehead and counselling him to be a man . . . it

more than ever clear to her the nearly empty shell he was.

A great darkness fell on her and a criss-cross of questions. . . . Some devil shrieking in her ear "Bessie, Bessie." At the same time a great island of light was calling out to her to jump on to it, and it only a short lep from her. But she was powerless to move a limb, though it had the smile of Brian on it. . . A great wonder was on her how he could be separated from her by even a foot of space and her heart fuller than ever of him. . . . It was the devil surely had a firm hold of her senses.

With that she was able to put out her hand, but it was only the tin can it caught hold of. . . . The more she tried to think the less clear she was with the thick fog there was on her mind. . . . Anyway the tin can was solid enough to her hand. . . . If the world was to fall to pieces itself the next minute, the cows 'd be crying out to be milked. . . . It's often before they helped her to see a thing.

SECOND CHAPTER

THIS way and that she rolled her trouble round in her mind, but no peace came to her. Moidered she was in all her seven senses. The cows were no use, nor the dint of hard work nor sitting still. She couldn't speak with Brian about it, and he gone off, till only the Lord knew when, to attend on a sudden summons from beyond the mountains. Joe was shut up in a scowl and set lips and silence ; with a plan on him to wear her down by means of the child, that she only gathered the drift of from Peggy's talk. And her grandfather sick on top of it all ! The storm, and it raging two days already, was some comfort to her, the way it kept pace with her trouble. Anyway, it drove Joe out of her path, through one alarm or another about a ship or the like, and he having to be on the watch night and day almost in the life-boat house.

There . . . it's scoured the keelers must be to their hearts' content, and she scalding and scalding them till she could see every grain in the wood, and smell the sweetness of it just as clean and pleasant to the nostrils as Bessie and she straight out of the tub.

It's little enough though she ought to be boasting of her work, and she doing it more from some blind push on her, to smother her mind by busying her hands, than from any good intent in regard

to the milk. Or, oftener still, through forgetfulness only.

There was Peggy darkening the door again. . . . It was best to talk of the storm to her and head her off Joe.

“ They aren’t taking down them storm cones ? ”

“ They aren’t then. It’s blowing from every airt it is, one minute and another. Haven’t you them keelers clean enough ? It’s to wear out the timber you will.”

“ It’s to rub what little mind I have out of me I’d like to, bad luck from it.”

“ It’s a heavy burthen on a woman surely.”

If it wasn’t for her blindness in respect to Joe it’s the great comfort there was in talking to Peggy since she lifted the lid off her heart. Though she might be agin you itself it’s a great feeling was on her for you. More than you’d expect of understanding in her, and no crookedness at all in her mind, though it’s many a kink was still in it. Wrong entirely she was, at the bottom, about life, through her supping more than any woman’s share of the world’s sorrow. A queer blindness on her in regard to love itself, the way she twisted it . . . she always longing for it and never getting a firm holt on it . . . or any holt at all if it went to that, and it always breaking in her hand or turning sour on her.

All the same there was a great tenderness in the way she handled the broom in your hearing, and she knowing that you were bothered.

“ It’s not to hate me you do any more, Peggy ? ”

“ I wouldn’t say that altogether. It’s far I am from the grace of God, that’d maybe wipe away a wrong thing from me entirely. There’s some-

thing bad in my flesh I'm thinking that'll keep on showing through me no matter how many coats of good resolution I put over it. An odd time it flames out like poison in me still. Maybe when I put myself under the hands of Father John, and I never yet, up to this, making what you'd call a real good confession, it might be different. But I don't know. . . . Where there's a warp in your flesh it's hard-set the grace of God itself'll be to cure it."

"It's the great friend you are to me entirely for all that."

"I don't know what's come over me at all and that's God's truth. It's often, I warn you, I still wake up in the night hating you like hell. And then something comes on me, and half agin my will my heart opens to you, and it's many a decency I see in you. But it is just as I am you must take me . . . and put up with all the bitterness you'll find in me, on account of the real good wish for you that has sprung up in me. . . . More like a draggled weed I am, God help me, that you'd see spearing through a heap of dung, than anything worthy. It's the queer mass of rottenness I am, Ann, that'd frighten a young woman even to look into."

"It's more of a saint I see in you and you making a bold effort after a crown of glory."

"Oh, blast . . . hell's blazes. . . ."

All twisted her face was with a passion that'd frighten you. Only you saw that the curses now were more agin herself than agin you. . . .

Was there any trouble in the world like Peggy's? Her own troubles were nothing at all, and the sea of love she could feel herself floating in in spite of

the worry of her mind. . . . But to have love thrown in your face . . . to have it grow sour and bad on you . . . to have the poison of it harden your heart and crooken your mind and eat into your bones. And then to have it in you to try and sweeten yourself again. . . . That was the mystery of the world. . . . And no mystery at all in the end, for the spark of God, no matter how it was denied or crusted over, 'd one day or another flame out through you like the leaven rising the dough on the dresser there. . . .

It was shining in Peggy's face now . . . not the full glow of the noon sun maybe . . . more like the spent ball it was, with hardly a ray to it and it sinking to its rest. But still it was the sun, with the same heat that it had in the clear noon hid very likely in the heart of it.

"It's near any match can set the fires of hell blazing in me."

It's the same twist was in her smile now that them saints must have, and they conquering themselves. . . . Could she risk talk of Joe on her and her heart seemingly melting to the world?

"Peggy. Put the brush by and listen to me. The mind is turning daft in me and that's the truth, the way it's pulling me this way and that."

"It's to listen better to you with my hands busy I can. Let me be readying for the cake. The dough is ruz enough. Still, it's no help I can give you unless your mind sees right."

You couldn't tell the woman to her face that no matter how fair she was trying to be, the only right she could see in the world was her bag of conceit of a nephew. Still you might find a track out of a maze through talk with one that had the

design to keep you shut up in it. Anyway, it was an excuse to speak of Brian.

“It’s to love Brian Hogan to the crack of doom I will.”

“You might then and still you mightn’t. But what in the name of God has that got to do with what’s on you, and you a wedded wife?”

“It’s more certain I am of it than that I’m sitting here this minute.”

It was a hard sneer that came on Peggy’s face at that. . . . Though it was how she seemed to be seeing something in the flour she was dusting the board with, the way she paused in her work and stared. . . . There wasn’t another word out of her till she was well into the kneading of the dough.

“There’s hate in me still and he long since dead, for a man I once thought that way of.”

You could see that she was steadying herself to be able to say it quiet. Still, when the words came, there was venom in them. Her lips began to move like as if she was saying a prayer. It’s a dead, resigned look came into her eyes then, not a spark of the fire of a curse in them. After a while she said, gentle enough :

“I might as well tell you, for a warning, what first put the black heart on me. . . . I was nineteen year old at the time, or maybe twenty. I was brought up hard, with the one notion on me to marry a well-stocked place. An egg I wouldn’t let go astray nor an ear of corn at the gleaning, so that I’d make sure of having a fortune. You mightn’t think it of me now, but I was well favoured in them days. The place I had my eye on was Tim Lahiff’s. . . . I can mention it now and he dead. And it might ease the curse I often put

upon him to speak his name without too much rancour.

“ To this day the farm would draw your notice, though young Tim is nothing in the way of industry compared with his father. . . . Well, one night he kissed me and we coming home from a mission ; and from that out it's not of the place I thought at all but of himself. He was the world and all to me, and 'twas how every day seemed to be a year till we could be joined. . . . Grand talk he had on his tongue. Black in colour I always was. . . . It's the bloom of a plum he said I had on me and eyes like the dark heart of a wood. Often, he said he'd rather have me without a ha'penny than another girl with a hundred pounds and a score of bullocks.

“ Well, he made an offer for me. But my father, God roast him through all time, wouldn't part with a penny. . . . Twenty-five pounds Tim stood out for. It's more than that I had saved of myself on the house by my niggardly ways. . . . I didn't know at the time that it wasn't the fortune only was in my father's mind, and in my brother Luke's, Joe's father . . . blast him, too. But to keep me here to my death they wanted, a slave to them and the place, without a penny lost in wages on me.

“ Well I remember 'twas the Friday before Shrove they showed Tim the door. I ran out by the back and met him at the gate. There and then, and I certain sure he wanted me bad, I offered to run off with him. He put this and that in the way, jumping over every awkward question with a kiss. I clung to him and he going, the belief on me that there 'd be only a night or two to

wait. . . . That was Friday night. . . . Before dark on Tuesday he was married on another woman."

Ann's breath escaped her in a wailing sigh. Sick in the heart she felt for the woman, and she kneading the dough there as calm as if she was telling you what Father John said in a sermon. But with cold hate in her eyes for all that, and a frozen pain in her voice that'd split a rock.

"There were years then and the whole world was a field of ice to me, with no sun on it. . . . When my brother Luke got married there was hate on me for his wife, for all that she reminded me of. More hate even than for Luke himself and my father, and that's saying a good deal. At the time I near hated God for His happiness. And it's often I envied the devil the power he had of wreaking vengeance on people. The only one in the world I had no spite agin was Joe, when he came. And I often wondered at it. . . . As for Betsy I couldn't bear the sight of her.

"Well, one by one they died off without me crying one of them. If any, there was gladness on me. . . . Or maybe it was more an easing of my hate . . . the thought I had of the bitter time they'd have before their God.

"Then Joe grew up. And my feeling for him grew with his years. It's queer thoughts about him being my own son used to be in my mind. It's to encourage him in hardness I did, and in miserly ways, so as to put a hedge between him and the world, and keep him all to myself. It was more like one of them female lions you'd read about in a book I was than a human being. It's to tear with my teeth I'd like to anyone coming between

him and me. . . . The summer his eyes fell on you it's near mad I went. . . . More than once the river tempted me. And often of a night above in the loft, and I in a fever of cold and heat, it used to be a relief to me to choose out the fittest rafter to hang myself from. . . . What I suffered at first and you in the house God 'd shut His eyes to for shame, though it's used to a great deal He must be. . . ."

There was a silence on her that you couldn't bring yourself to break, the look of searching wonder there was in her eyes, like a child in the face of something it couldn't make head nor tail of.

"It's the other night I'm thinking of," she said, with a kind of smile that'd near shatter your heart. But she hardened again the minute you got up and put a hand of sympathy on her. There was nothing to do but to sit down and let her go her own way.

"It's the one mystery of my life that I have no plummet on me to fathom. . . . It's no less of love I have for Joe, but there's some great change in the nature of it. It's the whole world I want to give him now . . . yourself more than all . . . like a mother you'd read of in a story, and I having no knowledge of the like in the flesh."

With that she put the cake in the bastable. And your own thoughts, that her anguish lifted off you for a minute, came back on you. . . . From the look she cast on you now and again, with a sort of craft and guile in it, it's little good she'd be to you except where Joe was to make his profit out of you. . . . In spite of all the understanding that had come on her, it's as little heed in the end she'd give to your pain as she would to the

suffering of the live coal she was putting on the cover of the oven, so long as you served her purpose of warming up Joe.

You could feel yourself in her mind and she scouring the table, cleaning up after herself. Though another might think from the care she gave to it, that her whole mind was in her work, 'tis how you knew well there was no other thought on her but you . . . and you only as a fond rib of Joe; that she'd still rather he'd be without, but that was more necessary than heaven to her now because Joe wanted you bad.

Just as hard as ever she looked, only decenter to you, as she stood by the hearth facing you, and she leaning on the broom.

“Believe you me there's no happiness in this world that's not a choice between one pain and another.”

It's how she spoke as if she had the certainty of all the knowledge of the world on her, and she never once in her life knowing any of the real glory of it. All her days hell was banking up pain agin her, only a few stray gleams of happiness on her. Like you'd see a winter sun, and it on the edge of night, burst for a minute through a black drift of clouds. It's how her foolishness 'd near break down any pity you'd have for her, and tempt you to laugh at her. But you couldn't laugh at her with that crafty look on her, showing that she could read a thought as well as another. . . . As much as so say “you're a born fool with all your high figaries.” . . . And with the weakness that was on you from your mind battering your heart, though you knew well she was wrong, it's a sort of half a fear grew on you.

“ I double defy you to leave the child.”

She was right, then . . . Bessie was the bullet they had readied for her undoing. . . . It's a great calmness fell on her. . . . Well aimed it was too, and not at her mind at all, but straight at her heart. . . .

It's how Brian had overshadowed Bessie for a while, but it was only like the sun putting out the stars. . . . Bessie was there all the time . . . woven into the very woof of her heart . . . whole worlds closer to her than when she was tied to her flesh in the womb. . . . But it was a bullet with no force in it all the same, and it falling spent at her feet the minute she looked close at it. . . . No one could put between her and her child. It's to laugh she had to, though somehow or another there was a tremor in it.

“ Is it mad you are, Peggy ? Why would I have to leave the child ? ”

“ Then you'll have to give up the man.”

Splashing about in a soft bog she was with only one thought on her, to find a firm tussock for her feet and to give a jump on to it.

“ What call is there on me at all to give up either of them ? ”

A face grew on Peggy with as little ruth in it as the magistrate within in Lismeedy had on him, and he fining her grandfather for a trespass of the cow.

“ It's a grown woman you are now, Ann, and it's to face the world you must.”

Though there was some fear on her now, it's nearly all wonder was on her at the words, and she trying to make sense out of them . . . there being a spice of kindness in Peggy's voice, severe and all

as it was. . . . But it's how fear grew on her, without any thought taking shape to make a remark let alone an answer.

“ It's as plain as a pike-staff it is. If you don't give up sleeping in the loft, and go back to your rightful bed, and put all thought of Brian Hogan from you, Joe 'll cut you adrift to hell and hold on tight to Bessie, and you'll never set eyes on her again.”

Like and she hanging once over the edge of the Duncorrig cliff she felt, with a holt on a hazel sapling only between her and rocks below. . . . It wasn't rightly feeling at all she was, and there a sort of deadness on her senses. It wasn't any horror of what struck her numb she felt, so much as the sound of Peggy's voice and the whole demeanour of the woman.

It was like as if she could see into Peggy's heart and read the whole soul of her by the colour of her words. . . . There was sympathy in them and sorrow, and a taste of her old hate for herself, and a great deal of what was very close to love. But, towering above everything else was the determination of her will to stand by Joe to the last farthing of his power and his right. In one way she was just a talking machine repeating Joe's words. In another she had in her all the sorrow and the firm will of the Saviour and He giving up the ghost. Joe's will was her will. She'd walk hell for him . . . sacrifice her and Bessie to him . . . sacrifice herself and her soul even, with as little bother as children, and they lopping off the heads of dock-leaf soldiers in their play.

Then, of a sudden, as the whole horror of it came home to her, her mind and her temper lepped to the tune of her heart :

“No man could be such a devil as to tear the child from her mother. Moreover, short of my death, nothing could separate me now from Brian. I believe in my heart death couldn't separate us.”

But it was a bitter knowledgable smile, with the hint of a sneer in it, that grew on Peggy's face :

“It's little you know of the devilry and cruelty of a Dunne, and there love on him. Joe is a hard man and you're the one soft spot in him. It's me, God help me, that ought to know the whole nature of a Dunne. It's to scatter your limbs to the four quarters of the wind he would, before he'd see you in the arms of another man.”

With all her own trouble on her, and it near past telling, it's to notice the break in Peggy's voice in pity for herself she had to. But it's to regret her hard words agin Joe Peggy did before they were well outside her lips. She bridled up, flinging her words reckless :

“It's the wrong strain there is in you to go back on a man and he loving you. . . . And he the best man in a rotten world. It's just and right for him to treat you as hard as he can compass, and to make a weapon of the child agin you. If it goes to that, don't he love her as much as you do ? And a sight more by all appearance.”

With that Peggy broke down entirely and cried as if her heart 'd break, facing the windy sky ; the muddled look of her betraying that the thoughts and feelings within her were all at cross purpose.

She could do nothing herself but cry in company with the poor soul. For if there was a world of difference itself between them in argument it's to feel certain she did that at the real bottom of their hearts they weren't so far apart. . . .

How long they sat there nursing their misery she didn't know, and the house still, through Bessie having her nap. . . . It's how the thoughts were chasing to and fro in her like the wrack of clouds in the angry sky without. . . . Her love was as great in her as ever, and no stain on it. . . . But it was how some devil's magic lantern was throwing false pictures on the screen of her mind . . . and, queerest of all, the good God Himself was drew into some sort of league with the devil. . . . Brian had her whole soul: that was God's doing. Bessie had a firm holt on her: that was God's doing. She was Joe's seemingly by the law of God and man. She was Brian's by all the laws of her own nature and of his; and what were they but the firmest laws of God? Bessie was made of her flesh . . . but she had Joe in her too . . . and they both loved her. . . . It's splitting her head was, with the strain of the fight between her thoughts.

Sudden, some light came on her. But in the middle of so much confusion, that she couldn't say if it came from God or the devil. Straight out she blurted the news at Peggy, sitting there like a graven image bereft by God and man.

"Maybe I could suffer Joe for the sake of the child if he'd let me have Brian?"

But Peggy only stared, all the sorrow of the dead on her. And though her lips scarcely parted, her words had the clearness and the heartbreak of a funeral bell:

"You fool, you."

She had the feeling then of the earth being shovelled over her coffin in the grave. . . . Though Peggy was agin her itself it's wisdom was in the

woman. . . . It's the bitter knowledge she had of the hardness and weakness of men.

If it went to that, and the love of Brian that was filling her own flesh as well as her soul this blessed minute, she could hardly share him with God let alone with any woman in the whole world.

“God save all here. It's me grandfather is worse, Ann. And he's asking for you constant.”

It was how Tom's voice lifted her out of the pit of hell, reminding her that God was still in the world and not blotted out of it entirely. . . . It brought a kindness on Peggy's heart too, for she ran for the cloak and pressed herself agin her as she helped her on with it; and ran out after her to tell her not to be in a hurry back; for even if it was all through the night itself she'd look after the child the same as if it was her own.

THIRD CHAPTER

It was how her love quickened all her blood and she striving to keep pace with Tom. It wasn't cross with her the sky looked any more. Like rollicking horsemen trailing their long cloaks in their speed the clouds looked; and they racing, eager to outpace other, and be the first with the news of this fresh music of her love in the most distant quarters of heaven.

That was the glory that was on her again. . . . A feeling that the angels and saints and all the blessed souls had their ears strained to catch every note of her.

Then, a bit of torn wrack, the hid sun gilding the outlines of it, formed itself into the figure of Brian and he throwing kisses at her. She could feel them on her face in the warm spatter of rain just as if his mouth was on her. . . . It wasn't walking the meadow at all she was, but the main street of heaven and it paved with all delight.

"There's a fear on Betsy that he won't get the better of it this time. She's anxious to have your opinion on sending immediate for Father John."

That gave her a jolt in earnest. . . . Selfishness love was, and it near making her forget the needs of her grandfather.

"Pray the Lord, he's not as bad as all that."

But Tom only shook his head.

"It's as easy and as cheerful in his mind he is

as if he was at rest after a hard tiring day. Talking mostly of my grandmother, as if she was sitting there on the foot of the bed listening to him. And the queerest thing of all . . . Betsy 'd swear her oath on it, so it must be true. And she watching by his bed in the middle of last night, she never to know in this world whether it's asleep or awake she was, didn't she see a woman of great beauty like they say my grandmother was, sitting on the side of the bed. Dressed grand she was, a cap fresh from the iron on her, with bows and fal lals on it like they used to wear in the old times, and strings reaching down nearly to the waist. And he in his night cap sitting up in the bed. Chatting and smiling just ordinary they were, though Betsy could hear no sound of their talk and their laughs."

"It's straight into heaven he'll walk surely."

There couldn't be any sorrow on her for him if that's how it was with him. And why wouldn't her grandmother come down for a couple of nights to cheer him on the way, and she likely having the same desire for him to come to her as he had to join her. . . . Though you'd be lonely for him itself it's glad you ought to be for him to go to her. . . . And wouldn't he be nearer to you as a saint of God than he was and he separated from you by a couple of fields. . . . There was an ache in it all the same.

Sweetened Tom was by the love Betsy lavished on him . . . the dross and the hardness near washed out of him. Love was surely the crown of this life and the next.

It was how Brian always reminded her of her grandfather. . . . It's glad her grandfather 'd be to know that she had found love. . . . Hardly to

be either glad or sorry at all she could be for him this minute, the little difference there was between life and death . . . anyway, between the earth with love on her and the brightest throne above.

“Have a care of the puddle.”

She had to laugh, though it gave her a pang, at how easy she was brought down to the earth and she walking the stars. Whether it was putting a wrong on her love or the wet getting into her shoe, there was some likeness between them in the first shock they gave. The one was easily cured by borrowing a dry stocking off Betsy . . . and it's just as little the other weighed on her this minute, and the look of love there was about the house.

It was how her grandfather, and he lying sick and helpless in the inside room of the loft, shed love over the whole place. . . . It was on Tom, and on the rushes he had laid down to deaden the sound . . . on Betsy and her eyes wore out with watching: not but Betsy had a good stock of it on her own account too. . . . You could feel it in the quiet of her mother's voice, and she showing respect at last for the grand nature she had struggled to make little of all her life; for fear maybe that her own smallness 'd be exposed like the wash to the gaze of the world. You'd think her soul had grown in stature, there was that new depth in her eyes, and she maybe seeing the truth at last. A sort of dignity even in her moving, and a civility in her talk with Maurice, and she never, to anybody's memory at least, giving a decent word to him before. . . . And Maurice himself, that love was never lacking in, had more of the softness of it on him now than of the sorrow of it that he was showing lately; the way his eyes lit up when she

crossed the threshold. . . . The children even, and they playing cheerful by the hob, carried love in their muffled whispering.

It was the changed house from what she used to remember! Always there had been the light of her grandfather in it. But that wasn't enough seemingly to give the colour of love to the whole place, the evil of strife her mother used to throw over it. But with Betsy's love added on, what other colour but of love itself could it have? It was the beauty of the Virgin Betsy had on her this minute, the way her face was lit up by the child within her . . . and she the dead spit of the holiest picture anyone ever saw in a book. . . . When she saw that picture first, no right knowledge of love being on her, she thought it could only be the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph. But sure it was only just some Dutchwoman or Belgian or the like, any woman at all heavy with child, and the man who put love on her.

It was how the nets themselves and the long lines, and the jugs on the dresser, and the very colour and feel of the air within the house, all struck her heart in the one way . . . a great peace and beauty on everything, that the storm without couldn't ruffle . . . that even turned the greyness of the day into a flush of happiness. . . .

But it was how the heart of a woman was a weak vessel. She wasn't half way up the ladder when the sound of her grandfather's hard breathing racked her soul. Like the creaking of a windlass it was. And Betsy, at the same minute, stabbing her with memories of his goodness, and moans over his loss to them. . . . How it's up into the loft he went at the time she married in order to

give her the room. . . . The doctor saying there was no real pain on him, but the fear they had all the same, and he struggling desperate for breath.

There was the old glint in his eyes the minute he saw her. And a whole lifetime of love he put into the whisper of her name. The same feel she had in kissing him that she'd have in kissing the crucifix, the whole story of the saving of the world rising in her mind, and her gratitude for it finding a way out in the press of her lips.

And he motioning her, more by a smile than by a movement, to the chair beside the bed, it was the awe of the Holy Week celebrations within in Lismeedy came on her . . . the Tenebrae and the other preparings for the death of the Saviour. The very chair itself was laid for the coming of Father John, a clean towel on the back of it. The new nightshirt that Betsy kept by her, against this day, was on him, shining with a whiteness that'd put envy on a priest's alb the first day it came from the iron. The box beside the bed, that used to have his pipe and tobacco on it, was covered now with the best tablecloth. And the two brass candlesticks, that lit many a generation of Logans to a happy death, were shining with all the brightness of Betsy's love. The two blessed wax candles, that used to lay on the top shelf of the cupboard as long as she could remember, were steadied with paper wads, ready for the lighting. . . . In one look that cut her heart, she saw the loving care of Betsy on everything: in the holy water with the sprig of palm stuck in it, in the fresh salt in one of the best saucers, in the clean water for the priest's fingers, not forgetting the tow itself to wipe off the holy oil.

Not a word could she utter. The squeeze of his fingers went all through her, and the whole of her life rose up in front of her . . . all the love and care he lavished on her . . . the beauty he put on her life and on the whole face of the world. . . . The smallest things had a deep meaning for her . . . the way his face was newly shaved, however they managed it.

It wasn't in the presence of death at all she felt. It was how she was sharing the hope she saw in his eyes of the wonderful new life, on the very doorstep of which she had a sensation of standing. . . . It was how a great light gathered in his eyes, and she hung on the struggle of his lips with the full certainty that what they'd utter would be the whole secret of life and death. . . .

The only words that escaped him, and he like a poplar whispering in the stillness of a June night, was "Lizzie." . . . The look on his face had all the knowledge and the love of God and man in it, and the tone of his voice the certainty of truth.

It must have been so that the Holy Ghost, long ago on Whitsun morning, put love and knowledge and courage into the hearts of the Apostles, and they simple fishing people like herself, well accustomed to reading deep things like the colour of the sea at night and the face of the sky no matter what cloud of darkness was on it.

With her grandfather's hand on hers it's to feel the thought of his mind she did, and see into his heart. Just as she was certain that he was seeing into the depths of her. . . . And if his face of a sudden didn't take the form and look of Brian!

The whole world shook around her, and it's to

know she did that she was looking straight into the heart of God and love and truth.

It was a shock to her to feel by the sound of his voice, and he speaking fairly strong to her in the tone of the world, that it was on the earth she was still.

“Why didn’t you bring him with you till I bless ye both before I go?”

“It’s beyond the mountains he is.”

The words escaped her without thinking; but it’s glad she was that they did. . . . He didn’t seem to hear her; there being some puzzle on his mind. It soon passed off, however, in a smile, and he said low:

“It’s how I forgot the storm and his duty by the life-boat. It’s for many a year I wasn’t fair to Joe for the light of love he kindled in you. . . . It’s happy I can die now. But I’d be happier if I could say a word of thanks to him and lay my hands on ye both together. If I outlast the storm bring him to me. If I can’t speak itself sure I’ll feel the power of the love that could turn you into what you are, the minute he steps into the room.”

It was how the whole world fell in ruins about her. Shivering naked she was on a lone rock, no light anywhere, a bitter wind howling. . . .

It might be a minute or longer she was in that state of darkness, without hope or any power of thinking. . . . When she came to herself it was to take notice she did of the cold draught between the door and the window, and of the biteen of lace screen Betsy had fixed on to the sash, tied back with the pink hair ribbon one of the childre had got as a fairing near a year back: washed and

made decent it was, but faded terrible . . . the October fair of Lismeedy Mary Ann got it. . . .

The whole house of her life was built on the corner stone of her grandfather. But it's outside of it she was now, watching it. By its own power, or by the hand of God, the stone moved away. . . . By some miracle she was in the middle when the crash came, smothered in a muck of stones and dust. . . .

Then, after a long while, during which her senses were a part of the nothingness of all things, there came a rattle of stones heeled out of a cart on hard ground. . . . The room grew around her again, and another cartload was emptied. She had the queer notion that it was from the bed the sound came, and it grating her blood. . . . All the time her grandfather's hand had been on hers. Her fingers closed tight around it now, but any warm blood it had was gone from it. To his face it had flew and it as purple as the frost-bitten top of a Swede turnip.

Good God! it was out of his throat the rattle came. . . . Sounding it was like the old mill-wheel at Brinney, and it having a fit of the creaks.

At the top of her voice she called for Betsy. But it's easy enough, though sorrowful, Betsy took what turned her own blood to water, and she hearing it for the first time. It's how it was on him before, Betsy said, and the danger wasn't immediate. All the same she'd send for Father John.

When she was alone with him again it's the desolation of a winter sleet storm was on her, a fearful grey darkness worse than the night. . . . There was hope for him and he still alive, but she

could see no sign nor promise of him ever understanding another word.

She couldn't let him go to his grave with that wrong thought of her on him. . . . To whisper and whisper in his ear she did that it was Brian she loved. But there was no signs of heed on him. . . . She prayed and prayed, but God was deaf to her. . . . Like Christ on the cross she felt, and He deserted in His agony. . . . God and man had turned agin her. . . .

At what point of time her mother came in there was no telling; her senses were that empty of time and feeling. But it was to drag fervour from the very roots of her heart she did and put it into every "Pray for him," when her mother started the litany. Twice over they said it, but no dint of praying eased him; only the shifting of his bolster now and again. Nothing they could do gave him any approach to sense or the power of speech. . . . It was how she felt that if he went before his God thinking she was Joe's wife in heart as well as in bond, it was lost she was for ever.

Queer thoughts she had that seemed foolish in themselves and couldn't bear arguing out. Still they had all the weight of a divine mystery that she'd have to take on trust; that her grandfather had the vision of God Himself; and that what he saw must somehow or other be the truth. . . . It's the great devotion and love he always had for the rules and regulations of the Holy Church. No matter how far afield his fancy 'd go through the day on gods and goddesses and heroes, with little thought of God in them, it's always to come back straight to God night and morning in his prayers

he did, and through most of Sunday, especially at the mass. It's how poetry was one thing and religion another, he'd say. If it went to that it wasn't always maybe he was able to separate them. While as for her, God help her, she never tried. But God, up to this, didn't appear to bear either of them any grudge for their shortcomings.

When her mind stopped bothering her, she couldn't tell. But when her mother broke in on her she had been to and fro across Lekan ford a dozen times at least in Brian's arms, and had walked the woods with him, and Bruagh glen, for days on end.

"It's queer talk there is about you, God help us. Speak low for fear your grandfather 'd hear the like."

"I'd like him to hear it. I'd like the whole world to know of it."

With that it's more interest her mother showed in her than she ever showed before. A kind of sparkle in her eyes. Then, into a sort of dream she fell for a minute or two without a word out of her, her eyes all aglow. Of a sudden she blurted out, short in her breath :

"If a man ever put real love on me, and I felt it back for him, it's to defy God and the devil for him I would."

Though she fell silent again it was a bridge she left standing between them. It was the first time there was any link of sympathy between them, or any feeling except dislike by which to cross over to other. . . . Would she go so far as to open up on Maurice ?

"It's somehow never to think you worth while to talk to before, I did. And it's little help maybe

I can give you now if I talk to you for a thousand years."

She fixed the bolster at that, though it's easy enough the old man was now, breathing quieter, his senses still gone however.

"It's through every note in the gamut of a woman I've been in my time: through hate, and the fires and passions of love that never gained their end. Envy was bred in me and the hardness of hell. It's often you heard me curse the Logans? 'Twas to hate and envy them I did for their power of drawing love to them. It was how I wanted myself to be every single person that made a man or a woman love them. I hated a loved woman because I couldn't be her, and a man because he didn't love me. It's fits of hardness I used to have, in between, when I usedn't to care for anything but what money could buy. At times I didn't believe in God or hell or love or the power of the devil, only in what 'd give pleasure to my gullet and my back. And it's little of either I ever had with the bad luck that always dogged our steps. . . . And love driving me all the time! I used to hate that old man there, God forgive me, for the memory he had of your grandmother. . . . I married your father with all the hardness of a Finnegan on me, and with only a show of love for him in the desire to get settled. With some image of me he was in love; but it faded away on him before I was well in on the floor to him. Tom was born in my bitterness agin him. When you were heavy in me love broke me to bits, and it's in pieces I walked the world for many a year. Maurice it was, and he coming home for the first time since my marriage. I lifted him up in my mind to the

topmost pinnacle of heaven and damned him down to the bottom pit of hell. I put all the comether of a whore on him, but he wouldn't give me a thought or a look. . . . I don't know why I tell you all this for my shame; and hate and love, to all intent, dead in me now. . . . It's to love and to hate him I did till I didn't know the differ between the two. . . . It's lost in a wood I was half the time; the love that I scorned in the beginning always tracking me and laying me low. Nothing ever turned out right on me. Tom, that I had some feeling for, 'd give my whole body this minute for a hair of Betsy's head. But the worst blow I ever got, and black hate I had on ye both for it, was when Maurice fell in love with you——”

“ Good God ! ”

“ And it's hardly to know whether it's glad or sorry I am now that you have broke his heart. Or, whether it's only deadened to all feeling I am.”

It was like as if her mother was pouring pain on top of her in bucketfuls up to now. But at last she had sunk her entirely in the bottomless ocean of the woe of the world. . . . She couldn't understand her at all. . . . It's wrong entirely she must be about Maurice. . . . He that couldn't do wrong or think it, he was that good ! It felt wrong to her, with the holy feeling she had for him. And the law of man agin it; though the church might allow the like an odd time. The misfortune of the world she was to every one if there was any truth in it. . . . Dreaming her mother was. Would she never stop talking, and all the horror she was putting on her.

“ It's beginning to feel I am that love has a sort of pity on me in the end. Tom always kept some

human feeling alive in me, that even my mad jealousy of you couldn't quench. For his sake I was able to put up with Betsy in some sort of a way, and she not a bad poor slob, though not fitted for any lofty fires of love. . . . And their childre hang round me as if I was the best in the world. Whatever softness I have in me now it's they put it in me I'm thinking. . . . What's on you at all ? ”

There was too much misery on her to speak. It was how the whole world of men and women appeared before her eyes, wandering about like ghosts in the grey of the dawn. . . . Groping their way blindly this way and that . . . love like a will o' the wisp leading them . . . putting anger and hate and bitterness on them ; or, at the best, sorrow. . . . That wasn't true either. For there was her grandfather with peace on his face again. And Betsy and Tom with the secure happiness of heaven in the looks they cast at other . . . and many another besides. It was the way her heart ached for Maurice, that made her see his face of suffering on the most of them. He was the greatest puzzle to her, and he her greatest sorrow. It's how her nerves were upset, and she to put any heed at all on what her mother said. It was only her hate of Maurice, and her jealousy, reckless in the desire to hurt. If there was any truth in it, it would cast a doubt on the truth of the heart itself. She could see causes for the failure of her mother, and of Joe, and of Peggy, but none at all for such a blight on him. If love had the eyes of God, how could Maurice have put his love on her ? And she having no answering note at all for him in the way he wanted, nor couldn't have. . . .

What if she'd fail Brian and bring all the sorrow of the world on him? If there was any good in her could she have put hate on her own mother and on Peggy, and trouble and anger if not hate itself, on Joe, and worst of all have wrung Maurice's heart? Had she love at all in her?

Good God! that was the sort of question that took the bottom out of the world entirely . . . put out the light of the sun and the stars . . . destroyed God. . . .

The eyes of her mind were aching in her and she trying to use them beyond their power. . . . It was the devil surely tempting her, flashing his false glass on her again, with questions on it that no unlearned girl could answer. And it all coming this time, likely, through her mother putting a lie on Maurice.

Her heart lepped again in her when she looked at her grandfather, the peace of love there was shining all around him. . . . There was no sign on his face of the ache he put on her and he mistaking Joe for love. . . . No, she wouldn't let them questions creep back again on her. By shutting her eyes she was able to see Brian only . . . a great light on him, strength and knowledge written on his face and no doubt at all . . . every look and line of him speaking the truth and the beauty of their love. And it wasn't only to see him she did, but to feel him all through her . . . to know she was one with him and one with God. . . .

"It was how I wanted to keep love off you and there nothing but bitterness in it."

Why wouldn't her mother stop beating the wind with her empty talk? It's never to hear another

man or mortal talk she wanted . . . only to see and hear and feel Brian through all time.

“ If it’s my advice you took and married on Luke Finnegan, it’s free to take the man of your heart you’d be this minute.”

She couldn’t stand any more of that nonsense.

“ Isn’t it free to do my heart’s bidding I am in any case ? ”

It was a sorrowful look was on her mother’s face now, no anger at all on it, only more than a trifle of worry.

“ Don’t you do that, Ann. Sure I know only too well it’s the temptation ’d be on you. Don’t I know it to my own bitterness and shame and sorrow ? It’s to sin with Maurice in my mind I did a hundred times ; and it’s to do it in the flesh I would if he only gave me the chance. . . . It’s queer talk this is maybe for a mother ; and it’s the feel of a mother I have for you this minute though it’s late in the day it’s growing in me. Don’t you do it, Ann. It isn’t for me to preach to you. But sure you often heard Father John on the hurt it’d do to God. It’s not too much religion was ever on me, though lately I’m striving to make my soul every Christmas and Easter. There’s little of it to boast of on me yet. But I wasn’t thinking chiefly of the sin, though I’m strong on that same. Only I’m certain sure it’d make it harder for you to part from him.”

She wasn’t thinking of that sort of thing at all. But her mother’s words put such a feel and a longing on her, that she couldn’t find voice to interrupt her ; or else she hadn’t the heart to do it.

“ It’s not to part at all from him I want . . . to live with him night and day is my heart’s desire.

It's all of him I want like any woman would. But more than that, I want just to be with him, to know he's there, to see him smile, to talk to him or to be silent with him . . . a thousand things everything . . . you know."

She could go on for ever on the things she wanted to do with him, and never come to the end of them. But the look on her mother's face made her trail off and stop . . . a sort of panic of fear on her. Swaying her body she was and mumbling half to herself :

"My good God. . . . My God above. . . . Bad a woman as I was I never dreamt of the like of that . . . to run away with him you mean and break up your bed and board. The like was never done in the parish of Brinney. . . . A sudden sin now . . . there is some understanding in that. And God might make light of it because of the devil's passion that's in you. It's wrong I was, ever to say a word to you in favour of that same love. . . . To break up your comfortable home! The finger of scorn to be cast on you! And there decency in Joe . . . you, to bring that blight on him . . . and, and . . . I couldn't believe it of you. To be that unnatural as to leave your young child . . . to bring sorrow and disgrace on the grey hairs of your mother. I couldn't ever lift my head among the Finnegans again . . . and you knowing how Kate looks down on me as it is. And what 'd all the neighbours say, tell me that? Betsy, and she your greatest friend, wouldn't have a good word for you. . . . The holy priest! not to speak of God himself! And your grandfather there, and he lying on the bed in front of your eyes . . . to kill him you would, and he maybe

going to get better again when the holy oil is put on him."

It was how waves of scorn and bitterness and fear passed over her. . . . No matter how inclined she was to laugh at Aunt Kate and more than the half of the long litany, it's still more than enough of truth was left in it to put a great dread on her. It's the feeling she had that there was no peace left for her in the world. If she got him it's a heartbreak she'd have on her likely. Still, if she didn't get him, it's broke her heart 'd be entirely. . . . What did she matter compared with him? It's broke his heart 'd be if she didn't go to him . . . God give her the power to steady herself and see straight. . . . The thought of any hurt on him blotted out any duty to Joe entirely . . . and near blotted out God and her grandfather and the child. . . .

"It's to fly the country ye'd have to . . . without likely a sock to yeer foot. Broke in his job he'd be. Two pounds a week good money he gets for it I'm told. And where would the cost of your keep come from if he lost his post?"

She thought at first that it was the sort of rocking motion of her mother and her wailing voice, her apron held up in front of her eyes, put the queer feeling on her . . . just as if the room was shaking to its foundations, a great blackness over everything. It wasn't the loss of the money and the comfort was troubling her at all. There'd be a great delight in roaming the world with him without a shoe to her foot. . . . It was something blacker than that.

Then it grew on her . . . taking shape like the world and a sea mist passing from it, everything

standing out with a clearness it wouldn't have under a noon sun. . . . Like as if his great influence and power in the world of men was painted on the wall of the room, and she was blotting it out with her own hand. . . . A sort of god he was among the people, the way he worked on them, and always for the right. . . . To see his power broken in his hand . . . to be the very person that broke it . . . God! . . . God! . . . anything but that. There was love and love. And it was on a low level entirely she was thinking of him up to this. . . .

The soul was sinking in her. It wasn't much help her heart was to her now, but her mind was seeing clear. It was only by standing outside herself she could see it right. . . . His name 'd be tarnished in the eyes of the world. The whole movement might be wrecked if a scandal came on him. Real love was to add to his power for the good of the world; to increase his good fame and not to destroy him. . . . To be hard on herself she must be . . . steel her heart agin him . . . kill it entirely for him that he might live all the brighter. . . . Like a horse labouring a heavy load up a hill she felt, and she driving herself to that sight of the truth . . . if it was the truth . . . the heart lagging in her and crying out agin her.

"They wouldn't have the heart to break him and he so true . . . they wouldn't do it . . . they couldn't do it."

The words flew out of her and she striving for breath, a queer loneliness on the world and no air at all in it to breathe.

"Arrah, have sense, girl. What is he after all but a small man that'd be easy put under? Didn't

they break Parnell for the like and he the King of the world . . . both the woman and himself black Prodestans and nothing at all hardly a sin to them. But the two of ye Catholics, well knowing the sin of it, and it the Island of Saints and all, God help us. Every child 'd be crying the catechism agin ye. Father John 'd have to curse the both of ye with bell book and candle . . . and well within his rights he'd be. For how could the world hold together, and the true religion itself, and passion to be given such power. If it goes to that it's many a man has a grudge agin Brian Hogan's work, or sees nothing in it, and 'd be glad to turn religious in order to knock the legs from under him."

It was to talk and talk her mother did, but her own brain was too dead to hear. . . . She couldn't argue with herself any more. One thing she was sure of. Not only could she go to the stake for him, but she could offer up her love to save him a hurt or to add an inch to his stature. . . .

Then, in another minute, it's to flame through her her love did again, just as if her mind was a thing of little account. Her mother was still battering her; but it was like summer rain her words were now. The only harm they did, was to bring out the scent and freshness of her love and make it glitter with glory. . . . Her body went out to him as well as her soul and a great peace fell upon the world. . . .

Father John coming up the ladder brought her back to the earth . . . the holy feeling she had on her finding its image in his face. A look he had on him that he always wore when he was carrying God on his breast; patience with all the sin of the world in it and a kindness for the sinners, just like

you'd expect God Himself to have. Added to it now was his man's love of his old friend on the bed. It was to look long he did at the peaceful face, with the trustful smile of a child on it, showing as plain as print the happy soul underneath.

"And how is the world using you, Pat, my man?" he said, after a long while.

No heed at all her grandfather took of him; though it's to think you would that his smile deepened a bit.

"It's likely conversing he is with higher than us," the priest said, with a sigh of envy like, taking his seat by the head of the bed.

And when her mother and herself and Betsy, who had come up with him, made an offer to leave the room, in view of confession or the like, the priest stopped them:

"I'm afeared he's passed all that. But sure God knows well there's no need of it, and his whole life a confession of his goodness. It's to humble me he always did and he asking for pardon, there was that light of God on him."

It's the same face of love the two men had in the shadow of the candles Betsy had lighted. . . .

A great fear of them both grew on her, side by side with the love she had for them. . . .

Never before did she feel the truth of Brian's love so strong in her, the firm conviction on her that it was the truth of God. . . . In the candle-light the pattern of the wallpaper was the holy tree for her eyes to glory in: rooted in her heart too she felt it. Clasped in her arms the trunk of it was, the blossoming branches overshadowing her: the warm touch of it Brian's body and the scent of the leaves his breath. . . .

While, all the time, in the shadow, driving terror into her, was the other God she believed in too: the God that shone in kindness and love on the faces of the priest and her grandfather. But His was a love that touched her now with the coldness of a winter sun without a ray of heat or pity in it. . . . The shock she had of standing dumbfounded at the end of a blind passage, and she certain sure there ought to be a door out of it . . . like as if there were two Gods in the world, pulling her in opposite directions, and she bowed down in worship of them both. . . .

The heart sank in her again, and the worry of her mind weighed on her like lead. . . .

Father John stood up, certainty in his face; love shining in it, that made her tremble with dread. She tried to put her heart into the prayers, but only her lips moved, as he gave an absolution on chance. . . . The miracle of her grandfather putting out his tongue for the communion, and none of his senses, in so far as the eye could see, on him at all, didn't move her to wonder even. She just took it, as she would a fresh blast of wind in a storm, as something that had to be endured; with a sort of dead feeling on her, however, that it was another weight in the scale agin her. . . . The last anointing was a blurred picture of a body, that had a look of her own, being anointed for the tomb . . . likely her mind was wandering back to something she once saw in a fair. . . .

It was the heaving of Father John's shoulders and he kneeling beside the bed, his white hair bent over it, that brought her back to herself. It wasn't the priest of any God he was any more,

friend or foe, but one of the kindest men in the whole world, weeping his friend. . . .

Her heart was unlocked. The blessed tears watered it and freed her from the clog of her mind. Like the grass in a sunny shower she was, drinking in the light and the moisture with joy on her. . . . If anyone could help her he would. If there was no present fear for her grandfather, and there was no sign of it now in his peaceful breathing, back to Brinney she'd go with the priest and tell it all to him.

FOURTH CHAPTER

IT was a set-back to her, to see the priest's horse and car at the gate of the bawn.

If she could be so bold as to ask him for a lift itself, it's not to talk rightly at all on a car they could. On a walk with him she had counted. To be at her ease with him under cover of the gathering dusk, and out of the range of Maggie Foley's hearing. It's the long ears them priests' housekeepers had, and longer tongues. They could make a whole story out of a word ; and the telegraph wire wasn't in it, the way they'd publish it to the world.

It's how she'd put speed on her by the short cut across the bog and be before him at the house. It might be for the best after all, and the terrible night there was in it : wild horses careering across the sky, a flush of anger on it ; the trees wailing and lashing themselves this way and that in their agony. It was how Father John 'd have more ease on him in his sitting-room, than to have to talk in the face of the storm and he striving to keep his feet on the bog path.

By choosing the right moment, while Maggie was putting up the horse and Father John letting himself in by the front door, she might be able to slip in unknownst to the old devil. God forgive her for saying the like and Maggie a decent poor woman enough, only a caution sometimes for curiosity. . . . If she failed in that, it's to face

Maggie in the kitchen she'd have to. Then God give her a ready tongue to escape under the raking questions. Maybe, not to let her in to see the priest at all she would, if she didn't think she had the whole ins and outs of the affair put before her. And if she let her in to him itself, as likely as not it's to be coming in and out of the room she would, with a lock of turf or the priest's tea or his slippers or the like, and putting in her neb if she got the chance or could make it.

'Twas a relief to her mind to be making a mountain out of Maggie and there no harm at all in the woman. Besides it's to shrivel her into the silence and the deafness of the kitchen, with two shut doors between her and the room, Father John would with one soft word if the occasion asked for it. And it's to walk straight in to him she could without Maggie daring to say boo to her, if she had the mind. . . . Only it'd be more circumspect maybe, for fear of Maggie's tongue and fancy after, for her not to know she was in it at all. Or, in case of the worst, to be decently civil to her and let out this and that for her to chew her cud on.

Maggie was no more good for keeping troubled thoughts out of her mind, and high fears and hopes battling within her, than if she tried to make a meal out of blind nuts !

It's the storm was a better help, the way it raged at her and put her on her mettle. It was how she felt in fighting it, and making headway agin it, that she could conquer the world. The wind put a tingle in her blood and courage in all of her, in her muscles and in every inch of her skin, the way the cool softness of it swept through her thin

clothes, flinging her cloak open on her and her hood back and loosening her hair. . . .

It's like a wild animal her hair was, the way it tossed and cavorted behind her, she drawing strength from every fresh tug of the wind on the roots of it.

But with all that it's only a poor weak girl fighting fears with hopes she was, the heart jumping out of her mouth with the pace she was making. Just as she found breath for another step, and she near spent, she had to knock the head off a black thought by some new hope or fancy. But, hopes or fears, she wouldn't examine into any of them! The fears she'd throw behind her on the wind: the hopes she'd hug to her heart, shutting her eyes to any sting that might be hid in them. . . .

There was no one at all agin her. God and the whole world were for her. Peggy and her mother were striving with other to help her. Betsy was clapping her on the back and wishing her luck. Them laws of God and the holy church weren't made for the likes of her, and Father John 'd help her to drive a coach and four through them. She didn't know how the likes of that was done; but when heaven willed there was always a way. Bessie 'd live with her, and Joe could see the child as often as he liked. Joe was friendly and would help her to cut the wrong knot. Great friends she'd be with him after. She'd find a wife for him, a good looking girl, no fear, that'd love the ground he walked on. . . .

As firm and as sure in her steps as a beast she took the bog path, dark and all as it was. . . . It wasn't dark. . . . That rattle of thunder was a whole army of drums beating her joy. The light-

ning splitting the sky was fireworks of heaven celebrating her. The rain swishing in her shoes and drenching her like a drowned rat, the way the floodgates of heaven had opened all of a sudden, was like . . . was like

She wouldn't let that lump in her throat get the better of her. . . . Good God! the teeth were shaking in her. . . . She was on the road at last and out of the strength of the wind. She'd make a run for it; till the blood pumping in her'd make her deaf and blind to the black things that were pressing on her. . . .

It was to move the latch of the priest's kitchen door she did, as if all the furies of hell were at her heels, her strength only lasting to slam the door agin them. The way she streamed rain water all over the floor and fell like a limp sack on to a chair in front of the fire, was enough to make any housekeeper cross . . . the teeth chattering in her and she shivering all over. But, beyond lifting her hands a little in surprise, Maggie only said: "If it isn't Ann Dunne, and the face of the dead on her!"

To pour some of the milk she was heating in a skilly over the fire into a cup she did, and lace it with a drop from a black bottle in the cupboard, and shove it into her hands.

"Don't mind about it scorching your tongue. Only get it down as hot as you can. Glad I am I had the milk ready for the priest, and I thinking him near big enough fool to start back in any rain. But sure they had sense enough in Clasheen not to let him. I'll slip the bolt on the door and you can undress here in the heat. By the luck of the world there's a blanket hot on the clothes-horse

there. I'll be back in a minute with my Sunday things. And let me find you stripped to the pelt and rolled up in the blanket and not a drain left in the cup."

A couple of suppeens put a new life into her. It's quick she carried out Maggie's command, and in half a minute she was as snug as a cat in front of the blaze, a world of happiness upon her . . . her whole skin burning with Brian and he filling her heart and her mind. . . .

It's hardly to keep her eyes open she could while Maggie dressed her, with the best of flannel to her skin; that the Logans never could rise to and Peggy hadn't the heart to spend on. A joy she had in the thought that it was fine things like them she'd wear inside on her and she with Brian, to give him pleasure and be a credit to him within and without. . . . Grand entirely she felt in Maggie's bombazine, though it was a bit slack itself about the waist and the breasts; and she thinking of the ache it put on many a woman's heart these ten year or more, of a Sunday, in the front seat of the nave.

You wouldn't believe how gracious Maggie was in her talk without a stime of curiosity in her, except about grandfather and the like that were public knowledge. No doubt it's to scent trouble she did, or maybe know well all the truth. But whether she knew all or not, she wore the best side of her nature, and didn't bother you even by a searching look. A great comfort the woman was; and if she had a scornful eye itself for many a thing in the parish, it's a pleasant way with her she had, and funny stories she poured out of her so as to make you forget the passage of time.

Sorra thing did they notice outside their talk, not even the rain stopping, till Father John's voice shouting for Maggie broke in on them.

With that her heart sank into her boots. It was only then that Maggie, making a pause in her hurry to attend on the priest, gave her arm a squeeze and whispered to her :

“Keep up your courage. All the good luck of the world go with you. Be in the room waiting for him.”

And giving her a sudden hug she hurried off. . . . It was how she had the thought on her that you had the sympathy of near every woman and the trouble of love on you. That, and the way Maggie melted, and she a hard woman, put great courage and heart into her. And it's to walk into the priest's room she did with no fear or shame at all on her, though the world might say she was wrong itself. But with a firm pride in her step and glory in her heart.

It was how the priest must be helping Maggie to put up the horse, there was such a long delay on him. Not that she wanted him to come quick. Many a thing that you'd make a race for, you'd be glad enough if something hindered it at the last minute. In one way it's glad she'd be to be at home again ; though it's many a pleasant thought she had and she alone in the room. She never got so good a look at it before, and never at all with the thought of Brian on her. It's a power of books Brian had at home in his father's house, and he a learned man like Father John. At the Kerrigans itself, and he only there a short time, it's littered with them he was. Maybe it's a grand room the spit of this they'd have to sit in of a

night, the day's work done, and he reading to her while she was mending his things. But sure it was only the gentry or a priest could waste a fire except upon the kitchen hearth! Still it was a pleasant dream to have: the firelight playing about on the glass front of the bookcase, though she doubted if they'd ever be able to run to mahogany or the like; and the turf box well stocked for the night. It's to look her fill at him she could and his eyes on the book. Made for love the soft light from the shaded lamp was. . . .

"It's heartily welcome you are, Ann. But what's on you at all, and I thinking I left you behind me in the house?"

She couldn't know from his kindness and gentle ways whether he heard of a thing or not. All the same, he put confusion on her, her wits flying out of the room so that she could only find words to say:

"No then. It's to skelp out in front of you I did."

Just the same as if she was quality from the big house, he seated her in one of the two grand horse-hair armchairs in front of the fire. Though it's to joggle about a bit it did on her, by reason of two of the castors being gone. It wasn't at his ease he was himself till he got hold of the poker, and was tinkering with the fire of turf and coal-slack Maggie had banked up careful. It was waste to let in more air on it, and it's a lecture Maggie'd give him on it for sure. Still the flame took her fancy off the cold that was beginning to gather about her heart. . . . Though his kindness, somehow or other, was making her afeared.

"Something very grave must be on you, Ann, to

bring you out a night like this, your grandfather in the state he's in and all ? ”

She knew then that he knew all about it . . . the very tone of voice on him of Mr. Sanders, the magistrate, making believe, without trenching at all on a lie, to hearing of the trespass for the first time, and he well knowing all about it beforehand. . . . It was how the cold feeling grew in her that if he was her friend itself, he was moreover her judge. She put no blame on him for it, and he the priest of the parish, the duty on him of holding even the scales of God. Only it made her see him different, a great terror of him on her, though there was no slackening at all of his kindness.

“ It's likely you heard this or that about me, Father John ? ”

“ It's many a thing I hear that I pay little heed to.”

“ There's a lot of truth in it this time, all the same.”

“ Tell me all about it and maybe I could be a help to you.”

It's gentler than ever he was, though a power of sadness, that he tried to hide by poking the turf, grew on him ; till it's afeared she was that he had set fire to the chimney. She could see by the lines of his face, the pain on it making it the more stern, that he was agin her.

“ Is there any use in me defending myself at all ? ”

A look of great pity he cast on her ; but it's keen she felt that there wasn't a stime of softness in it. She could see “ No ” growing on his lips ; but he thought better of it and said :

“ Is there anything between ye ? ”

"There's great love between us, and a couple or three of kisses, or maybe more. It's no state I was in to keep count of them."

She couldn't hide the pride that was on her. But the thing itself, or the way she said it, hurt him. It's to look older and more hunched he did, a great sorrow but no anger at all on him. The stiffness of the poker he held in his hand was on him all the same, and he gazing sad into the fire. Another time she'd feel for him and he looking like that. But with the love that was on her now, and it calling loud on her to fight for it, there was no pity at all in her. It was fighting for more than her life she was, and ready to put pain on man or God for the glory that was singing in her . . . almost glad of hurting anyone that stood in her way.

"It's the same as if he was all my own by the laws of man and God, I feel for him . . . all that God put in me to feel for the man I love I feel for him."

Half wishing she was that he'd flare out agin her and break the strain that was on her. But it's staring at the fire he was still, just as if he wasn't heeding her at all. . . . The empty sound of her own voice, echoing back out of vacancy, blotted out her courage, and she fell to crying bitter tears, just for nothing at all seemingly.

"They'll do you good. They'll do you good. And, after, we'll get Maggie to wet some tea for us."

She tried to spur herself to anger agin him. But with the feeling he had for her in his voice, and the look of kindness in his eyes, she couldn't do it.

True for him, a great softness had come on her. . . . It's to cry with her head in his lap she'd like to, all the sympathy she felt he had for her. And, as if in answer to her talk, he laid his healing hand upon her fingers. It's to kiss it she wanted, all the understanding of her that flowed into her from him, and real sympathy; only she couldn't take that liberty with a blessed priest.

"It's well I know the suffering there must be on you. It's a hard road we all have to travel, the weakness there is on us."

It's no impression his words made on her at all. She only wanted to go on feeling the sympathy of a human being, and God and her love deserting her. Desolation entirely fell on her when he stood up to take his filled pipe and a spill off the mantel-piece. She watched him lighting it, and pressing down the tobacco with his finger, as if it was the only thing that was going on in the world, some deep meaning in it passing her by. Before he had finished using the spill he broke into talk in a great hurry, a couple of words or so between every puff:

"It's a great respect I have on me for that young man . . . the honour and uprightness there is on him. It's many a long day since I met his like. It's the power of good he can do for his country."

Pride and love began to swell her heart at first. But before he had gone far, it was how his face changed into the likeness of her mother; and his voice sounded as if there was a warning in it. Fear gripped her, and it was tears of despair she wept now, the heart split in her.

Like as if he was following the thought of her

mind the priest broke in again on her, letting his pipe go out on him.

"It's to destroy him entirely you would, surely."

It was seeing the holy man for a minute with the eyes of hate she was, the heart sleeping in her and her mind wide awake . . . a crafty old man with the wisdom of the world on him. And why wouldn't he? and he all his life hearing this tale and that of misery or a broken heart in the confession box, or maybe on a deathbed.

It wasn't, like her mother, at the heel of the hunt, or by chance, he knocked her over. But under the wing he got her at the very first shot. . . .

Plain as daylight she saw Brian at his work, the interest of it in his eyes, the love of it in his voice. . . . She saw scores and hundreds of men groping about in the dark without him, his light quenched on them . . . and himself wandering far, the memory of all he had lost weighing him down. . . .

"There's a friendship that's higher than love . . . that is love, at its highest."

She could see the drift of that but she had no courage on her to think it out. It's a weight was over her heart, darkness on her. . . . The heat of the fire was pleasant. . . . It's careful Maggie was of the worn carpet, and there a patch darned in it. . . . Would Peggy remember to put Bessie to bed in time? . . . It wasn't craft or guile was in the priest's face at all, but the height of goodness according to his lights, and a depth of knowledge. . . . Three generations of people knew the kind heart he had. . . . And he never once throwing sin at her head. . . .

She saw what he meant. . . . Brian was in danger. . . . She was the one to save him. God died to save the world. . . . She could kill hope in her to save her god. . . . It would be a trifle to die in the flesh compared with putting the hope of Brian from her. Still, the light of him would always be in her. . . . Give your life for your friend. . . . Lots and lots of sayings 'd help her. . . . The pride she'd have in seeing him grow to be a great man. . . . It's more happy than ever she'd be. . . . Oh, God! the depth of agony on her! . . . The emptiness of her arms . . . the ache in her breast. . . . She'd give heaven and earth, her soul, everything, to touch his hair once. . . . Sinking out of life she was. . . .

The hand of God was on her brow . . . warm and friendly and cooling . . . a blessed rope and she drowning . . . the hand of a human being, and she near pushed over the edge of the world. It wasn't to bother about him being a priest at all she did now, though the thought struck her. He was warm and she like ice. . . .

"God will help you."

She clutched at his hand for fear he'd leave her, and he all that was left of the world of men . . . God Himself. . . . He was helping her surely. . . .

The trembling passed off her and she began to notice things . . . the calendar hanging over the fireplace. . . . Love in her agin . . . like a cushion it was all round her heart. . . . She hardly noticed the priest taking away his hand, God smiling on her. . . .

Like a distant star Brian seemed at first . . . into a great glorious ball he grew, having the light and likeness of the sun. . . . He was far away from

her but he was in her heart too. . . . He was all over her. . . . She could feel him in her hands and they pressing her knees. . . . Like one of them dreams it was, with a fear on her that any move 'd wake her. Thank God, it was firmer in her than all that. The priest, and he putting turf on the fire, didn't disturb her. It's to smile at him she could ; and feel grateful for the loving heart of him she got back in his look. He was the grand man to let her alone, and not to speak.

There was no loss at all on her when he crept out. Nor when Maggie brought in the tea. A decent, quiet woman she was, that kept herself to herself, she not giving even a curious look at you, and you thinking you were a spectacle for all to stare at. Grateful that they let her be she was. . . . And, no doubt at all, there was comfort in the tea.

And they alone again, the priest began to talk about this and that . . . her first communion and the idea of being a saint she had . . . her being stung by a wasp on the finger and her thinking 'twas the devil envying her. . . . The high opinion of her her grandfather had, and the faith of him in the purity of women. . . . How a child was wound round your heart . . . how it was a little seedling that you had the care of till you tended it into being a glorious flower in the image of God. . . . How it was the lot of all to suffer. . . . Only this world wasn't the end ; and there was no knowing what great things God 'd have ready for you in the next, and no limit to the faith and hope you could put on Him. . . . How it was to women God looked for the highest sacrifice, Eve having put the worst of bad luck on

them. The highest destiny of all they had, however, in keeping men straight and love a pure and holy flame. . . . How it was the wish of God that no pebble should be put in the path of people stumbling to their goal for fear they'd be turned aside from it. . . . And there was many a thing that was little harm in itself, and still you'd be bound to curb yourself on it for fear others 'd be hurt by your act.

A feeling he gave her, in the heat and comfort of the fire, that she had a high place in the destinies of the world. She was at once nothing and she was everything. She could lift a man to heaven or sink him to hell. It wasn't what she thought or felt was often the right thing, because of the power of the devil. And it was there God and His priests held out a candle to guide her path. Love in the marriage state was a good thing, but bad outside it. Still, if through weakness she took a wrong turning, she could pitch aside the sin of it, and hold fast to what light of God there was in it . . . and make that light, by the grace of God, a torch to lead the man and herself to a higher glory.

Mixed up it all was and hard to seize . . . no rights at all in her but a power of duties . . . to love her mother no matter how hard she was on her. . . . He skated light over Joe but was strong on the child and her grandfather. And it was a lot he had to say, though it meant little to her, of marriage being an image of the union of God and His holy church, that could never be broke in this world or the next.

No doubt whatever, he brought some of her religion back to her. In a pleasant sort of way

too, fighting shy of hell and making much of heaven and the grace of God. . . . Some of it stuck. But what remained with her most wasn't religion at all hardly. Anyway, her mother, and she having little enough religion in her, made near as deep a mark on her with it as the priest did . . . just Brian losing his job and his power, and being belittled in the eyes of men. . . . Like a child cuddled in her arms she saw him, the duty on her to save him from himself.

FIFTH CHAPTER

BETSY didn't say a word at all and she handing her the letter, but she looked enough. . . .

The last straw Betsy was, after the way the priest had piled wrong after wrong upon her. For all his quiet beginnings it's little, if any, rag of decency he left on her in the end. And she thinking it was all over, it's to put on his purple stole he did and start off by himself with "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned."

Little thought of sin there was on her at the time, and she feeling like the Blessed Mother, heartbroke, at the foot of the cross on which she had offered her all. The purity of the world, and it frost-locked under a foot of snow, she felt on her. A cold, dreary sort of beauty in it, like Christ Himself must have felt when he said "Thy Will be done." Only He and His Mother had their pride left to them, and the freedom of their will. But it was to make her walk through a dung-heap, and field after field of clauber, that didn't leave a spot of her unsmirched, Father John did, by question after question, before he was done with her.

A mass of filth and corruption and selfishness she was seemingly, without a clean spot at all on her. A bad name he put on feelings that were her pride and her glory. And things he put into her mind that she hadn't thought of at all till that minute,

not in the way he meant anyway. Though, there and then, at his mention of them, she longed for them with a longing that burned her to the marrow and near blotted out her hearing. In heaven she felt one minute and in hell the next, all the devils she ever heard tell of tearing and mauling her, soul and body.

To throw dirt on every leaf and branch of the holy tree he did. Planted and watered by the devil he said it was, and the flowers of it were poison berries. Twig by twig he broke it off; and then tugged at the trunk of it with the ruthlessness of the dentist within in Lismeedy and he pulling a tooth out of her, a world of gentleness without pity in his voice, and a face on him that had all the hard softness of one of them saints in a picture. . . . With a sigh of real content he set fire to the refuse heap and burnt it to ashes before her eyes.

Then, with sternness and love on him, he held up in front of her the glass of her conscience that he named "The Mirror of God's Will," for her to see herself in. A feeling of rawness and emptiness she had, like as if not only every tooth in her head but the whole of her entrails, and her soul itself, had been dragged out of her.

Before God, it was the bitter glass was grigging her! Staring she was at one of them witches of hell, foulness and bitterness all over her, and she sizzling something like a heart on a skewer over a blazing fire. . . .

A drop of altar wine he put on her lips to recover her. . . . The feeling of one coming to the sight of things again, after a long illness, she had on her for a time. . . . A sort of dead gladness that all

the confusion was fallen off her. It's to cling to his hands she did, as if he was the only friend left to her. . . . And when he spoke again, with a power of sorrow and love on him, it was to lap up his words she did, with the eagerness of a hungry cat over a saucer of milk. . . .

It wasn't herself so much as the first woman was to blame, the wrong twist Eve had put in the flesh and in the mind. But the grace of God 'd straighten that out. It's the dryness of the saints maybe 'd be on her for a time, the road to God being thorny and bitter. But the star of duty 'd be always there to guide her. And the smile of God 'd be always upon her, though at times maybe it might be hid from her itself. After all, it's only pilgrims they all were. What were a few minutes of the deceitful pleasures of the earth compared with an eternity of the joy of God? And it wasn't her own joy only she was making a bid for, but Brian Hogan's . . . his chiefly, for man was the weaker vessel.

After a time it's far away his voice sounded, and little heed of herself or what he was saying was on her; any more than she had once, and her grandfather showing her a picture book when she was rising out of a fever. . . . Only, before her in the air, Brian appeared. God and the world and all the devils in hell threatening him. . . . Anything at all she'd do . . . die or live . . . it was all one to her . . . so long as a hair of him wouldn't be hurt.

Yes, she'd promise anything. For sure, she'd mend her life . . . tear the heart out of herself . . . if she ever had any feeling again in this world or the next. As hard as a limestone rock she'd be

with him. . . . It was a bitter pill not to see him at all. . . . But she'd strive not to. Yes, to write to him she would . . . to tell him of the end of all things.

It was to laugh in a way that'd waken the dead she did, when the priest put the penance of seven rosaries on her. Some queer thought on her, that it was payment for the glory of heaven or all the tortures of hell, and she not rightly knowing which. . . .

The patience of God Father John had with her, and he bringing her baek again into the path of grace after that breakdown. . . .

To remind her he did of himself trying to keep her soul in the hands of God from the day he christened her; of the high hopes he had of her and he standing by the bishop when the holy chrism was put on her in confirmation; of the joy that was in his heart over the white soul of her, and she making her first confession; how it was to see her as an angel of God he did, and she dressed in white, a wreath of blossoms on her, when he put God on her tongue for the first time. . . . That was how her grandfather saw her too . . . and it was how Pat 'd expect to see her, and he opening his eyes in heaven, to-morrow or the next day . . . her whole life, without and within, an open book to him.

It was to try hard to frame words of sorrow she did, as she bent her head for the absolution. But it's back her mind flew to a trick Maurice once played on her and she a girl . . . giving her a drink of spring water out of a wormwood cup he brought back with him from his travels. It's to spit it out at the first taste she did then; but it's

to drain every drop of it to the dregs she did now, and it the will of God. . . .

All that and more was written on the letter Betsy handed her. Like a message from the dead it was, her name in Brian's handwriting upon it.

Maybe it was some look in her face that made Betsy turn away from her, as much pity as condemnation on her, and leave her be, to sink down on the hob and read and read over and over again on the envelope all that happened and she with the priest. . . .

She was still kneeling, pardoned at his feet, the whole world a blank to her, when Betsy broke in on her again :

“Where were you at all ?”

“Above in Brinney at confession I was.”

“Thank God for that same.”

The sigh of joy from the depths of her heart that Betsy gave, brought back the feeling of wonder that grew in her the minute she said good-bye to the holy priest, and he coming with her through the storm, bareheaded, as far as the presbytery gate. . . .

It was to make an extra effort she had, to drag herself back to the world, and answer Betsy that, of course, she'd sit up with her grandfather, and let the rest of them go to bed for a couple of hours, and they tired out. But, soon, Betsy, and she doing this and that about the kitchen, faded away entirely. And it's back again, in a jump, her mind went to the priest's house. . . .

No sooner was her back turned on him but it was like two women she felt, walking in the one step, the one soul of her in some queer way divided between them both. . . . Passing by the end wall

of the chapel a sort of holiness came on her first . . . that ghost of herself warning her at the same time to blot the feeling out of her. In dread of something, she looked up at the sky. And there was the wrack flying out of it into a big cloud bank at her back; the moon, wearing a friendly face, driving away the darkness, all the glee of the world on her. . . . It was no use for the ghost to whisper that the moon was a jade of the night and not worthy of trust. It's to mean nothing at all them hints did, with the heart of love in her again. . . . It wasn't only in her heart the holy tree was then. . . . Her whole self was it, and it taking the bog path in stately pride, a flame of glory in every leaf of it. . . . Shining with such a splendour that it struck dumb the warning ghost in her. More like the Queen of Heaven than any earthly queen she felt, the odour of holiness she drank in from the starry night and from the glittering images of her love in every bog pool. . . . 'Twasn't under the cloak of night at all she was walking, but in Brian's love, and he filling the earth and sky with beauty and glory. . . .

Then, sorrow on her, at the first sight of the house it all fell from her, as if some great fear of the handiwork of man blasted her. . . . To stumble across the bawn she did, without strength in her limbs or in her heart, terrible dread on her mind. . . .

"If so he wants to wet his lips through the night, you'll find new milk in the white jug."

Far outside of her even her grandfather's pain was now, and the doubt on her whether she ought to drop the letter in the fire without opening it, or not. There was no provision for the like of that

in the orders Father John laid on her. . . . A whole eternity of joy and sorrow she had lived through in the minutes since Betsy put the letter into her hands . . . knowing well all the time that it's to open it in the end she would, if she was to burn in hell itself for it the next minute.

"It's the Kerrigans' servant boy left it. Peggy ought to have more sense than to send him over here with it . . . publishing you to the world. But I oughtn't to speak maybe, and it all over now, please God."

With trembling fingers she tore it open. Some great hope upon her; and she looking maybe for one of them high names he called her in the woods. Anyway, it's a lonesome pang she got in reading only "Mrs. Dunne," with no other word of beginning. And, under it:

"Could you be at Kerrigan's to-morrow at ten o'clock, and send out the circulars that'll come by the morning post to all the names on the long list? I have to stay in Lismeedy.—B. H."

She caught the eagerness in Betsy's eye. With a bitter laugh enough she tossed the letter over to her:

"Maybe you'd like to read it?"

"Yerra, why would I?"

But it was quick she ran with it to the lamp for all that. And it's suspicious looking she grew after her first stare of disappointment.

"I wasn't born yesterday. . . . We all know. . . . Don't do it, Ann."

Whatever temptation of hate came on you for the blindness of Betsy's mind, there was no doubt at all on you for why she threw her arms around you and drew you to her, nor of the love of you

that made her blurt out with tears running down her cheeks :

“Tell me again it’s all over, Ann. I didn’t believe the half of what I heard anyway. Nor a word at all of it if you give it the lie. God knows it’s not prying into your heart I am.”

“It’s all over. That’s it. It’s all over. For God’s sake go to bed, Bet, and leave me be.”

To strain you to her heart she did till you were afeared for the child in her. One minute blessing you, and the next, cursing the world and Joe . . . a great comfort to you. And it was to take kindly the hint of your wish to be alone she did, wailing all the way to the room door her own happiness and your misery and the unfairness of the world.

When she was alone all sorts of grisly thoughts came on her from the heart of the fire. . . . How she was a lock of wheat dropped down the hopper of the mill, to be ground to dust . . . or one of them virgins that took no heed of the oil for their lamps . . . a sort of joke of God maybe. . . .

When Betsy called out from the room to say that Maurice and Tom were down at the lifeboat house so as to give Joe a sleep, it’s in the middle of one of the rosaries of her penance she was, not well knowing what she was doing. Quick she made for the ladder for fear Betsy ’d start another talk on her.

The bitterness of hell, outside her will altogether, grew in her at her mother’s curious look, the minute she stepped into the sick room. And some devil prompted her to say :

“It’s off to your rest you can go now, and the soul battered out of me.”

“What madness is on you at all, girl ? ”

“The grace of God is on me. I did yeer bidding, and the priest has put God’s pardon on me. It’s more like the devil is in me.”

It’s to stare at her in kindness and pity her mother did, and to stroke her hair, so that she threw herself on her breast and cried her fill. And she patted her, tender enough, muttering all the while :

“Sure it’s well I know the feel of it. It’s the devils trying to suck you down again. Spitting their venom into a sea of foam around you, they are. Well I know it. Strike back at them with a couple of prayers and set your teeth.”

With that, the first natural laugh she had for many an hour, overtook her. And a great softness came over her, through laughing at her mother. It’s an understanding you felt she had of the bitterness of the world, and she having sin and childre to her credit, besides the heartbreak of love.

“There was a great fear on me that you wouldn’t rise out of it so easy. Thank God, it’s not the stuff of them great lovers you’re made of. Or maybe it’s a bit of a saint you are after all, and the weight of prayers your grandfather put on you. . . . It’s like a magnet a big temptation used always to draw me . . . something of grandeur in it. I never said I’d overcome what’s troubling you myself, mind you. But sure I know well it’s best for you. Cruel hard it must be all the same.”

It’s all the more comfort you had out of her, and she almost in a dream, groping about in the dark of her mind.

“It’s the queer world it is. And it’s from one quicksand to another I’m stepping even at the end of my days. If it wasn’t talking to God on my

behalf I thought the old man was a minute ago! Real sleep is on him now, so you can rest awhile. If you lie your head on the side of the bed and go to sleep on a rosary, it's to take all the grief out of you it might. And I'll take my own beads to my bed with me and make the attempt to cover a round of them for you myself, unless the sleep drops them from my fingers before I'm through."

Some day or another the deadness of her mother to this and that might grow on her. . . .

Pins and needles in her mind as well as in her body she had. The clatter her mother made and she going down the ladder, was a worry to her. The silence that came after was worse. She moved the clothes on the bed and moved them back again. Wherever she looked Brian was beckoning to her. She said another round of her penance, but he was mixed up with every mystery, and no sorrow at all was on her. She tried to sleep, but she was too tired for it. . . .

Like as if he was painted on her eyeballs he was, and she never able to escape him. A game God and the devil were playing with her, trying to wear her out. The moaning of the wind and the way it whistled through the sash, racked her. The flame of the candle blew this way and that, making shadows of Brian wherever her eyes turned. Water her blood was, when the rattle in her grandfather's throat began again. Hardly able to move her limbs, she tried to ease him. It's peaceful and happy he looked in spite of the horrid sound. More peaceful and happy than when he drove a knife into her, though the noise was worse. Glad he was, no doubt, that she had made her peace with God. . . . The rattle was a threat to her not to

fall again. . . . God, her grandfather, the holy priest, her mother, Betsy, Peggy, Joe, the innocent child maybe, were all ranged agin her. Brian himself maybe, and he writing to her, "Mrs. Dunne." . . .

What fools they all were! and he not wanting her at all likely. To send out circulars and the like! That was all he wanted her for. Bruagh glen was a dream, and Lekan ford. . . . She was the great hand at them sort of things all her life. . . . Out of a sunbeam or the shadow of a beech she was always able to make a lover. . . . The desolation of the world was upon her, the ache of it in her flesh. It wasn't for her grandfather at all the death-watch was ticking in the window. . . . Talking about the Logan grave, and how many more it'd hold, they were already. Cold and dead she was, ready to sink into it.

Was it coming to mock her Brian was, standing there smiling, love in his eyes, six feet of manhood in his stockings? 'Twasn't a god only he was, but the finest of fine men. His knees were shaking the same as her own, the same tremble all over him. . . . Like a furze bush on fire on both sides of it they were, the flames rushing to join other. . . .

Stunned she was by that fall from the fullness of the joy of God to the cold earth. Trembling she was, but clear-minded. 'Twas that loud rumble of her grandfather that woke her to the law of God. In one of the heavens surely she had been, although it was only the image of the joy itself that was upon her.

Maybe God 'd pass the sin of it by for the certain sureness it gave her of her duty. She didn't know how she could ever repent of it, but Father John 'd

guide her. Maybe it's how God 'd forgive her the great happiness she had on account of the greater happiness she missed. . . .

At the back of her mind that desire of him must have been all the time, and they all seeing it except herself. Drummed into her in the catechism her duty was, and in Father John's sermons, and at many a mission, and in Betsy's talk. 'Twasn't far off the truth Peggy was in the names she called her. There was right even in Joe's anger. No wonder her grandfather, and the light of God so strong in him, couldn't let as much as a suspicion of her enter into him.

It was no glass a devil was holding in front of her now, but looking she was into the conscience Father John and God bred in her. . . .

Still, God wasn't too hard on her, and she having no feeling of sin. The memory of Brian hung round her now like the dew on the hedges of a summer morning, not hurting her at all but a great refreshment to her heart. When she had regulated him properly in her mind he'd be a stepping stone for her to God. It's often she wondered about St. Paul and he rapt up into the seventh heaven, and the figaries of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross that Father John preached of an odd time. 'Twas how she used to think that them mystics were some sort of magicians, only holier, that you'd see in a booth at a fair. But it's better she knew now. It's some experience like her own they surely had in their lives. Made one with God and the whole world of things they must have been some time or other. . . . Even the old pagans knew of it, according to them tales of her grandfather . . . gods coming down to the women of the earth, and

the like . . . one story about the marriage of heaven and earth itself. . . .

She'd have to keep her mind off them things till she got more settled in her thoughts, and all sorts of desires budding out in her now. It's to try and unravel the duty Father John put upon her she must. He didn't ask her to drive Brian out of her heart altogether. That showed his sense, for she couldn't do the like. Snug in her heart he was this minute for that matter . . . a pure image of him that she saw in all the outer showing of God. . . . But never again that other way. . . . She mustn't even think of it, it shook her so. If that weakness shook her again it's of his ruination she must think. . . .

If that wasn't his letter still rolled up in her fist. . . . Father John said not to see him. That was hard doctrine surely ! The new strength that was in her and all ! And she mustn't let her weakness bring hurt to the movement. Likely he'd not be back from Lismeedy at all. But sure if he came back, by any accident, wouldn't it be better to end it all between them by word of mouth ?

Wasn't he the best man in the world when all was said ? Without help from Father John or any one, he was sure to see the rights and wrongs of it, and be beforehand with her in setting it all straight. Back they'd go to the point where all was safe and right, and make a new start from there.

Ten o'clock he said. . . . Dropping with sleep she was. . . . The candle was safe in the basin. Happier than ever her grandfather looked. . . . Pleased with her. Where was it that they went

wrong? Always right Brian was . . . the beautiful skin he had . . . a warm colour under the tan . . . white about the body. It's to kiss him from head to foot you'd want to . . . the beauty of God on him. . . . On her bed in a palace of heaven she was . . . one with him . . . God and Heaven itself and all the beauty of the earth was only the image of their love.

SIXTH CHAPTER

SHE was afraid to move for fear the wonder and glory of her 'd be shivered. Peace and a whole world of beauty was upon her. . . .

“ Take this cup of tea and then go and lie in my bed.”

Her mother's voice struck cold at the roots of her heart. The wonder of the night that was still on her when she opened her eyes, vanished entirely. If she had only another second of it she might capture its full meaning. No shape at all it had now, only the feeling on her, that if she hadn't seen God face to face it must have been only a very thin veil was between them . . . like as if she was floating on a sea of content it was . . . the sea and the air and the sky all made of colour and glory.

Her arm was stiff. The empty feeling she often had in the dawn came on her . . . a great ache entirely this time. Fear took hold of her. There was something in front of her that she'd have to face. . . . Grim enough her mother looked in her cloak and shift. It wasn't that. Nor the hard breathing of her grandfather, and he no worse seemingly, though his face was grey as the dawn. Nor the ugly look of the bare loft in the murk. Nor the storm shrieking without, and battling its way

in through the door and the window, and wailing like a ghost among the rafters.

Hard and forbidding the whole place looked. Like a witch her mother was and she tending the sick man, her hair steeling down from under her cap, the guttering candle and the daylight struggling with other to darken the furrows of her face. The tea was hot anyway, though it's only a ghost of tea it was, and it made from the wetted leaves of last night. . . .

That was the weight that was on her: before the day was done she'd have to part from Brian. Only the wetted leaves of a woman she was, God help her. Hardly the remains of a woman at all. The heart was pounding like a forge hammer through the emptiness of her, the plain duty that was before her.

Lost entirely he'd be if she had her will on him. She saw it all now with the clearness of the scoured boards of the floor. He was her man as well as her dream of beauty. To be with him night and day she wanted. He was the dawn and the fall of night to her, all the colour of the world under the stars and the sun. The feel of his flesh was the key of heaven itself. . . . Like a shivering ghost breaking through the cold sods of the grave she felt. . . .

God was hard on her, she'd say that to His face. May God forgive her her ignorance, and His law a dry path for her feet from the time she was a child. And Father John wasn't a hard man, though the temptation was on her now to name him hard and bitter as hell. . . . There was no escaping them and they a mountain across her path. She didn't know though. With the love

that was on her, it's tempted she'd be to defy priest and God if Brian wasn't hurt by her act . . . and Bessie, Bessie. . . .

Where was she drifting to at all, and her mind made up? Sure the whole world was agin them both . . . a broken man he'd be. When all was said, that was the only thing that'd give her the strength to part him. It was all mapped out for her as plain as the patch-work on the quilt. God give her all her wits if she had to argue with Brian. But that was the least He could do for her, and He putting a job on her that her whole nature cried out against.

"You'll get your death of cold if you go to sleep there again. There's no fear at all on the old man to-day. It's across home you can go if there's anything there calling on you."

Sleep? that was a good joke surely. It's never to sleep again she would, and she straying through a world of darkness like that wandering Jew. Nothing she could think of but had a bitter joke in it. Her punishment 'd be for obeying God and not for denying him. . . . She must see that the child was all right. Was it how her grandfather was smiling at her? As much as to say he trusted her, knowing she'd do the right. Everyone she loved in the world was bent on breaking her heart.

"It's the queer mood is on you entirely, and no word of speech on you. But the sleep 'll righten you."

"All the sorrow and bitterness of the world is on me."

"Sure the blessed sleep and time 'll shake that off you too."

It's no word she could answer to foolishness of the kind. The bed, and she lying awake on it, thinking of him, 'd be more than ever like the gridiron the holy martyr was roasted on . . . or a carding machine. If only someone tore her, limb from limb, it might ease the pain of the thought of being parted from him.

It brought her to her senses to see that the work of the world went on, no matter what pain or joy was on her. . . . Her mother having the kitchen swept and all, and the fire made! It's a great permanency was on the laws of God and men. . . .

She'd have to clean herself and look decent, and she likely meeting Brian soon. It's to hold her head high she would in the face of them Kerrigans, if the world was tottering under her itself.

The cold water was a relief. . . . It's to separate him into two parts she would: put from her all that was unlawful or that'd hurt him, and hold fast to what was allowed. Millions and millions of things there were in him that'd give her joy and comfort, and whole rainbows of colour on everything she looked at, no thought of wrong at all on her. She'd have to try and get back to that. . . .

There was no call for hurry in that severity, and she in a queer mess-up with God ever since the priest laid his hand on her. When she had it out with Brian 'd be time enough for strictness. . . . Not a wood she'd ever walk through but she'd see him in the trees and hear him in every rustling of a leaf, the colour flooding her with the beauty of his soul. . . . As long as she kept his body out of it she'd be safe.

Would she run back for her hat or wear her cloak? And she'd have to eat something. If it wasn't better looking she was than that old looking-glass made her out to be, it's to drown herself she would. It's the devils surely were turning her askew in it. . . . She must keep that song out of her mind. As firm as a crowbar she was now, and she mustn't let any devil's glass cross-track her. Weaker than the water in the bowl she was, if the truth was told. And why wouldn't she? Dirtier than it too, the way she had left the grace of God slip from her. . . .

If her feet weren't firm on the grace of God and she talking to Brian, it's in a desperate poor way she'd be to stand up agin him. . . . No one knew better than God the terrible weakness that was on her. . . . Pity He must have in Him somewhere. . . . Sure He had, and He the God of love and mercy. He was sure to forgive her all the rest for the firm resolve that was on her. . . . She was too mixed up in her mind now to feel sorrow. But to-morrow, or the next day, she might be able. . . . God 'd understand that.

“ Oh, my God, I am heartily sorry——”

God of Heaven help her. . . . There was no use in churning words out of her. If it was angry with her itself He was, sure it's well accustomed He must be to waiting on sinners. . . . To-morrow or after, maybe. . . . And, for an earnest, she'd try and finish her penance. . . .

It'd be a blow surely if he wasn't there at ten o'clock. . . . She mustn't think of him at all. To run across she would and have the cows milked on Peggy before she got up, and wash and dress the child. Bessie 'd be a firm anchor to her. . . .

Anything at all to fill in the time. . . . Thinking of God only them prisoners always were, and they waiting the hangman. . . . The man of all the world that reminded her most of God was clouding God out of her mind again. It's the sore tried girl she was. If she prayed now it's not to know to which of them she was praying, she would.

SEVENTH CHAPTER

THE despair that was on Christ on the Cross gave her courage and she lifting the hasp of the gate. She could still do the will of God though she had no heart at all in doing it. All the way along the cliffs she kept shouting to the storm that she'd do it. Though her heart 'd break, and all the light of the world go out, she'd still do it. . . . Whether she was doing it for God's sake or for Brian's, she wasn't thinking at all now. . . . In a queer muddle her religion was by this. More by good luck than anything else she was on the side of God. . . . But she'd be fair to Him and say that if He was agin her in trying to save Brian, it's to defy Him she would, the same as she'd defy the devil, God pardon her.

Out of her wits she was even to think the like of the good God, and she tearing the heart out of her to do His will. . . .

"It's the terrible weather that's in it, Mrs. Dunne, praise be to God."

"It is that, thanks be to God, Thady Brady. Is there anyone at home at all?"

"Tempting God they are surely, and they all gone in to the fair of Lismeedy in weather of the kind. Still it's a fire you'll find inside, before you in the room."

"Mr. Hogan isn't back yet?"

"Sorra one of him."

To bend her head in shame she did. A stray word of Betsy's, and she resenting it at the time, put that hope on her. Though it's well she ought to know that when he said he wasn't to be there, he wouldn't be in it. Weaker than one of them straws whirled round and round by the wind she was, eager to find a footing anywhere for the hope of her heart . . . to the extent of putting a lie on him even, and he not capable of it. A feeling of humbleness he gave her, and she not worthy to tie the lacing of his shoe.

Then, the next minute, if Thady didn't open heaven to her :

"It's to strive to come out he said he would, before you're done, if he could get through in Lismeedy in time."

In the lightness of her heart it's to laugh at nothing at all she did . . . praising the look of the house and the fresh coat of whitewash on it, and this and that; not knowing well what she said, great hope lifting her above the earth. To laugh and laugh she did over Thady, and he telling how Julia Ann, the servant girl, had to race here and there for a whole hour in the face of the storm to gather in the young turkeys she took with her to the fair; and how he himself had to blockade the front door agin the wind and it determined to pull down the house.

So gay she was, and her heart in the sky, that it ed him on to tell her how the Kerrigans came by such a grand house, with the only hall in the parish in it, except the big house and the priest's . . . she knowing it all by heart ever since she had any hearing on her. How it was a priest's house by rights, being built for Father Ned Lavelle, a stone

floor in the kitchen and the room boarded and all. How Father Lavelle left it in his will to his nephew, Tim Kerrigan's father, instead of to the parish. And, maybe, it's to this day his soul was roasting in purgatory for it. Some saying the deed deserved hell itself; though it's likely a priest 'd know how to circumvent so severe a misfortune, and he well knowing all the roads there and back.

Talk of hell brought her back to sense again. . . . Brian's soul she'd have to think of, too, Father John said. . . .

"A big bundle of a letter came for you by Jack the post. Lying on the room table it is."

With that she made a drive for the back door, and it open on account of it being on the lee side of the house, hoping she didn't know for what.

Damped a little she was by the strange writing on the big package; but she wasn't dashed entirely till she had rummaged through the whole bundle of circulars, without her finding a line at all of his handwriting anywhere. Still the disappointment brought her to herself a bit. This wasn't at all the right way to be thinking of him, building one hope on another, without any foundation to them, and she resolved and all to part from him.

That thought stopped the breath in her surely. She warmed her hands at the turf fire in the grate, thinking likely to bring some heat to her heart. Only to make her shiver the more it did. A dislike grew on her of the room, and the trouble them Kerrigan girls took to make it sprightly for him. The cheek of them putting their photographs over the fireplace! Though a better advertisement of their plainness you couldn't look for. . . .

Good God! if it was jealousy was growing on

her, alongside of everything else, it's a terror entirely her life 'd be to her, and she parted from him. The holy way she had fixed him outside her too, and she walking along the cliffs, the wind and the waves shouting his grandeur.

Above and beyond her he was, like a saint you'd pray to. God's voice she often used to hear in a storm, and God's horses she used to see charging the cliffs, the white manes of them tossing. To-day somehow, it was all Brian. . . .

The same with the wood. Long ago it used to remind her of the glory of God. And now ?

But its jealous the saints and angels might be, and do him some hurt, if she thought out into words all that was floating about in her head. And it's too well bred in her religion she was, to put him, in cold blood, as high as God himself. But, God above ! with all them fit thoughts on her, if a great part of her wasn't wishing to have him here, beside her on the rag mat, warming her hands.

Was there nothing left in the whole world that she wasn't bound to see him in ? The cows never stopped singing his praises all the morning. It was his eyes Bessie had and she dressing her, and his feel when she cuddled her to her, hardly able to let her go. Even Peggy had a good word for him. Praying didn't shut him out, nor sitting still. Work was no use. . . . Still the circulars might, and she having to spell out the strange addresses, she being little used to the like. . . . Sometime the grace of God 'd come on her and help her. Unless . . . and it'd be no surprise to her either . . . the grace of God itself, when it came on her, 'd turn out to be him. . . .

Where was she now at all, at all ? Deeper into

the bog she was sinking every minute, the head turned in her as well as the heart. Going to give him up she was! Out loud she'd keep saying it till she could hear herself above the storm. By dint of shouting it at herself, her heart 'd have to listen to its duty.

If it was only a crookeder handwriting he had itself. But it's as clear as print it was, so that you couldn't go astray in a word of it. Still the pen was bad, and the ink as thin and sticky as her Uncle Matt's porter; and she'd soon have a crick in her back and in her fingers. All them 'd be a blessed relief to the pain that was on her.

Michael Burke? Was that Mihael—Diarmuid—Teigue or Mihael—Sean—Liam? Tourlistraheen was the address of them both. If all the names were like that one it's the black night 'd be on her before she was through with them. Long ago she should have tackled that list and set it right.

"I never dreamt there were so many as that."

To stop in the middle of an M the pen did. Not a move was on her, except of an eyelid, and that of its own accord, to look at the pile of letters in front of her; surprised in some corner of her as to how they grew into such a heap. Listening to him moving about behind her she was. The dead sort of pain of having her mind set on nothing, only writing names and shutting envelopes, left her. The ache in her bones went. A feeling she had of floating in the air, joy and peace on her . . . as still as a lake at sundown without a ripple on it . . . full of all the wonder of the world . . . waiting for all the wonder of the world.

"The Kerrigans won't be back till late. I've told Thady to get us some sort of a meal in an

hour's time. I asked for your grandfather in passing, and it not far out of my way. He's better if any. There's a crowd gathered by the lifeboat. A big three-master in the offing looks to be in trouble, but she says she wants no help and can weather it. How far have you got?"

"There's only ten more."

She likely looked at the list and counted. She answered him for certain, for she heard her words far away. But it must be some machine part of her that did it. A hulk without a mast or a rag of canvas on her she was, tossed about this way and that in the bitter waves. The light had gone out of the air, leaving her dead cold, without joy or feeling in her. What worry was on him at all? Afear'd to turn and look she was, for fear the breath 'd go from her, such a tightness there was on her heart.

"Better finish them first, and then we can talk."

She'd feel it less for him to grind her under his heel, and she thinking she had no feeling left in her. The names swam in front of her. He never spoke in that tone of voice to her before. Like as if he was pushing her off from him.

Still . . . still . . . it might be that too. The heart began to beat in her again, and her blood ran warm. It might be forcing himself back from her he was . . . agin his will. There was that sound in it. Just as if he wanted to go to her and something was holding him.

The heart stopped in her, a greater coldness than ever on her. . . . Maybe the talk had got as far as Lismeedy already? . . . There, that was the last letter, but her lips were too dry to lick the envelopes. Hitting the toe of his shoe agin the

grate he was, and he never doing it except he'd be in a flurry, and never before so savagely as now.

"Did you see the Kerrigans in Lismeedy?"

"I did."

The squeak of a mouse was all the courage she had left in her for the question. And it's to answer her back he did with the bark of a cross dog. Only it put heart in her, for she could read love in it.

"People is saying this and that."

"The devil blast them."

Hate and anger and trouble and love were in his voice, bringing comfort to her.

The next minute he was sitting over against her at the table, twisting his fingers as if there was great pain on him.

"I brought all this trouble on you, Ann."

Hardly more than that she could hear of all he said, with the love that was flooding her, her eyes near drawn from their sockets by the love on his face. . . . Asking her pardon he was. The pride of Lucifer grew on her, as if God Himself was kneeling to her. The humbleness of a worm was on her that he could do the like. All of her that wasn't drowned in his look was lost in the very sound of his voice. Like the music of a well overflowing his words were, rocking her senses into the happiness of the blest.

"Trouble? Trouble? What are you saying at all? It's my pride and my glory it is."

Not the tenth of what she felt did her words carry. There was no putting it into speech. Like as if the soul and the spirit within her was a glowing light, piercing her body in every pore, and turning it into the same stuff the soul itself was made of. A white light, and hardly flesh and blood at all,

she was. One with the stars and all the beauty of the world . . . one of them glorified bodies on her that God promised the saints in heaven through all eternity. Above hurt and harm she felt. All the powers of the earth and air at her bidding. God in her. . . . To show her glory, the sun flooded the room. Like as if the light of her overpowered the darkness of the worst storm since the big wind.

It wasn't by the feel of herself only, she knew that all that was in her. She could read it in his face. At her words, a great light came into his eyes. Humility and pride and love on him. Wonder and thanksgiving in it . . . like was on the faces of the pair God showed Himself to at that supper. The reverence that was in her for him at that minute, gave her the thought that it must be in such a way God looked, when His eyes first beheld the world of beauty He had made by His love.

Standing he was, gazing at her, as if the light was half blinding him. Then he bent his head, and the tremor of a poplar in a light wind rippled all over him, as if a great fear was passing off him for ever. But his voice had still the shake of it as he said :

“ God be thanked.”

There was that mixture of God and a child in the humbleness and power of the love his words were made up of, that the body and soul near melted out of her in gratitude. Shook to a height and depth of love she was, greater than ever before ; feeling like as if she was filling the whole earth, and, at the same time, dissolving to nothing at his feet in worship of the boards he stood on. . . .

Then he laughed with the joy of a child on him.

"A fool I was to think that you had looked in the bitter glass, and your eyes always fixed on the holy tree. A new world we'll make with our love."

He went on talking, but his words were lost in the whirl of her brain. Father John, God, her grandfather, Bessie . . . the whole world of men were shouting at her, waving their arms agin her, all sorts of tattered old flags in them . . . conscience and the mirror of God's will and duty and religion printed in big letters on them. . . . The song Brian learned her was putting up a fight agin them, making a mock of them. At times it sang out above all their shouts. And then again they'd drown it, roused to a mad fury by it. A line of it here and there topped them all now and again:

"Gaze no more in the bitter glass

.

For there a fatal image grows,
With broken boughs, and blackened leaves,

.

For all things turn to barrenness
In the dim glass the demons hold."

Then, a line rang out that shook her more than any:

"To see men's souls bartered and bought."

"Bartered and bought." The words flung themselves at her, burnt themselves on her brain. She saw the yellow skin and bleary eyes of Foxy Luke bargaining for her, dribble on his toothless jaws. . . . And Joe . . . Joe offering a hundred pounds for her. The song jingled the gold

sovereigns in her ears. She saw them like red suns in a fog, dancing in front of her eyes. . . .

Then this turmoil died down in face of another picture that flamed up in front of her: Brian on a platform, his eyes lit up, the power of God on him, swaying a multitude. Huzzas and glory all around him. . . . An image, like one the strawmen carried round at Candlemas, was lifted on the outskirts of the crowd. . . . Men and women turned their backs on Brian, jeered and threw rotten eggs and rotten spuds at the straw figure. . . . Up to the platform they carried it and set it beside Brian, and pelted them both, jeering all the time. God! her own face on it. . . . Then the whole world turned into a field of mud, and across it, broken and bent, Brian was struggling in the sleet, pelted all the time with scraws and clauber. . . . And above it all God was looking on, the stern face of a judge on Him, and He weighing out justice. . . .

Hardly any feeling at all was on her, only her mind groping about for a way to serve him. . . .

Then she was sitting in front of the fire with Father John, and he talking to her with love for herself and Brian on him. Gifted by God agin this day she was. Even before her birth God had a care of her. Born into a right way of looking at things she was. If He took her father itself, and her mother was no great things, didn't He leave her her grandfather to guide her steps. In the grace of God she walked all her young days. . . .

What people called love was mostly the sin of Eve, or passion set on fire direct by the devil. Beasts men 'd be if it wasn't for the law of God. Holy marriage turned passion into sanctified love.

Stray one foot from the appointed track, and what was holy became the blackest of sins. . . .

It wasn't into her heart she had to gaze, for that was sinful in itself unless the grace of God was in it. It's to look into the law made by God she should. Holy trees and the like were a deceit and a snare of the devil, unless it was in the form of Joe they grew.

He wouldn't say that Brian was a devil, as people who put deceit on women often were. He was a good man snared in his senses, heading straight for the pit. His soul as well as his reputation in the good opinion of men she'd have to save.

Her slip from grace 'd-be the means of her climbing to a higher flight of glory, in the greater sanctity of her home, the truer love of her child, the conscience on her of knowing how near she was to destroying both. But, most of all, she'd save a sinner from himself and the power of the devil, and make him a shining star in the life of his country. . . .

All that and more passed through her mind, quick as flashes of lightning riving the sky, with the same stabs of fear, and it having more of a grip on her now, through her forgetting her duty so often on the least excuse. . . . Them two images 'd never leave her: Brian, a star for the light of men, and Brian, an outcast. . . . She saw herself playing weighdy-buckety with him. Only instead of they being at opposite ends of the plank, he was at both the ends, and she balancing it in the middle. . . . the power on her to lift him to the stars or sink him to hell. . . . her duty plain to her.

“ Oh, Brian, Brian.”

All she could do was to throw out her hands towards him, and sink her head on them, and they falling in weakness to the table, the bitter tears of her duty overcoming her.

To come across to her he did and lay his hand, gentle as a soft wind, on her head.

“I couldn’t make out what was on you. I saw the clouds gathering. There’ll be difficulties, of course. For a second or two I couldn’t keep my own eyes off that damned glass. Poets know our weakness as well as our strength: ‘Or only gaze a little while.’ I’ve flung it at the heads of the devils that made it. God is in the sky again. Look at the sun.”

A lull in the raging sea of her she felt, under a sky without a cloud in it, the balm there was in his hand and in his words. Hope on her, she lifted her head. But it was faded out of the corner of the room the sun was, the storm glowering and shrieking worse than ever.

The bad omen drove a cold wind through her and she turned for comfort to his face. The look of him sent a glow of heat and peace all over her, the light of his eyes scattering all the darkness of the world. The feel of his coat agin her cheek had the delight of the first Spring wind in it. The touch of his hand on her head was as calming as Ballyclough harbour in a storm. The gladness of a child over a fairing was on her. Like one of them yachts dancing over a glittering sea in all the glory of her speed and shining beauty she was, every rag of her canvas spread to catch every puff of the kindest wind that ever blew. She was the holy tree surely, every bud in her bursting into blossom.

He turned back her head, and her lips waited for him with the thrill of wonder and love on them that she used to have and Father John giving her the Blessed Sacrament. . . .

The thought of the priest put a cold chill on her, but it was lost in the glory the kiss put upon her. . . . There was no room in the world for any more happiness. . . .

A live sod, jumping the fender on to the rag mat, woke the both of them to time and place. But it took a scorch of her finger, and she striving to lift the hot embers on again to the fire, to bring a glimmer of her backsliding home to her. She strove to fend it off by pretending to herself that there was nothing in it. But the feel that was still in her heart gave her the lie. She couldn't cover that from God, and He able to rake all its secret places with a searching light.

The distress on Brian and he wiping the black off his fingers eased her a little. To try and gather her scattered wits and gain some strength for her will, she took again to the chair.

More like a litter of pigs at a cross-roads she felt than a sane woman : a whole half a dozen different women in her pulling her, all at once, this way and that, and she not know how to turn.

That holy tree went on growing in her, bigger and bigger every minute no matter how she strove to check it. No matter how wrong she said it was, it gave her the feel of holiness. Still, over against it in her mind, her duty was calling loud to her, putting wrong on her.

With his back to the fire he was standing now, his hands in his jacket pockets, a frown on him. More to the storm than to herself he jerked out :

“ We must put a stop to this talk.”

That ought to have put comfort on her ; but instead, it only brought cold to her heart. It was no more than a miserable ghost of heartiness she could put into agreeing with him.

“ Of course we must. How will we do it at all ? ”

Some hope was on her that he'd find a way out by which she could do her duty, and still hold on to her holy tree. She watched his face, just as if she was one of them condemned prisoners on the scaffold, on the lookout for a reprieve at the last minute. Though it was a serious enough pucker he had on his forehead for a while, it was with a sort of devil-may-care shrug he said, with a smile on him :

“ By giving them something real to talk about.”

It wasn't so much his words as the look of determination that followed them that made her limp all over, a sort of draggled heap of misery. All the love in her had jumped in gladness to his words, only to be paralysed by the whole army of fears that rose up in front of her.

It's to dare hell he would with that look on him. If she hadn't the strength to save him it's broken he'd be. And there was no strength at all in her. Melted with love of him she was, at the very time that she needed all her strength to stand up agin him. New waves of it dashed over her every time she looked at him. The air around her was fuller of it than it was of light. Shook she was to the foundation of her being. If he put his hand on her all power of differing from him 'd leave her entirely . . . if she had any power at all to do it even now. Her mind told her to deny him, and all her limbs and every organ of her quivering

like fiddle strings under the bow of his love. Duty and God and religion were like feathers near blown out of sight by it. . . .

In the anguish that was on her it's to pray to her love she did for help agin itself. . . .

Brian seated himself opposite to her, his eyes on the wall at her back, as she often saw him do at a committee meeting. Whether it was due to her prayer or not, love let her look at him now without him swamping her. His accustomed place of chairman he had took at the head of the table.

The resolve grew in her, as firm as an iron rod, that no act of hers 'd move him from that post.

A full river of love flowed in her still, but more gentle, and more amenable to her mind. To back her in her resolve it did, in some way; though there was sorrow on her, thick as the mist on the river bank of a September morning.

Bessie rose before her, and God, and Father John, but she asked no help from any of them. To call only on the love Brian planted in her she would, no matter what pain she deluged herself with. The love he put on her was stronger than herself, stronger than him now. For he had only her weak heart in the place of his own. . . .

"It's a bitter road to ask a woman to travel. But there's no other way in honour and decency. You must come to me, Ann, open and above board."

It's on the shifting sand his words put her again, love playing havoc with her. Desires flew about in her like singing birds; though all the time her parting from him was as clear to her as the black pall now covering the sky. Like the firelight

taking delight in the darkness, her heart had its pleasure in spite of the black fog that hung over it. Singing little songs to her: it's the proud woman you ought to be, Ann, that he wants you to walk the world with him. It's the proud woman you are. It's pleasant any road 'd be that he'd be on. And so on and so forth, darting about in her on wings of white fire with little gurgly laughs.

Glum enough her mind was that it couldn't join in with them and enjoy them to the full.

Anyway, it was only a slack answer enough she made to him:

"'Tisn't the bitter road I'd mind, but the rocks that are in the way of getting on to it at all."

"There now. Into the bitter glass you're looking."

"Into your eyes I'm looking."

With that she could see his own fears for her in a quick passing look, giving her courage. It was a relief to know that he too could be lost in a maze, even if it was only for the littlest whileen.

"You love me?"

"I do then."

"Don't take your eyes off your heart. The holy tree is growing there. . . . It knows no obstacle."

"Don't I know it's growing there? Don't I feel it growing and growing in me till it's topping the sky my head is! You are the root and the sap of it, and most of the flowers. But there's many another branch on it that your love has watered and blossomed and made grow strong. It's they that are a warning to me agin my own selfishness."

"Prejudice and convention and old wives tales,"

he said with the gentlest of patience, not without an edge of contempt to it, however.

But that couldn't hinder her now, and some voice that was hardly her own speaking in her, a great clearness on her.

"It's hardly to know what them big words mean I do. But it's to see the holy tree I do with a new light that you have put in me. More than ever I love you. My body burns for you till I think I could sell my soul to have your body as well as the soul of you that I know I have. Your love fills every corner of me. It is my thought and my power of speech. My very words are made of it. Still . . . and that's the mystery of the tree of love you have planted in me. . . . Mixed up with the branches of you is a twig here and there of love that isn't you. Hardly one of them that you haven't added some new flower to. Some of them that were withered and bare before you came on me, have quickened and blossomed under your breath. There's Bessie that's almost a tree all to herself, her branches spread so wide in me . . . Joe threatening to keep her from me too. My grandfather, who has roots in my heart as long as I can remember . . . a feeling on me that his love is the very air of my soul, without which near any tree of love in me 'd wither and die. Some feeling of duty to Joe that's near as strong as love. My mother and Peggy even, that have begun to blossom since you put love on me. Father John, that strove all my life to plant a garden of God in me, with never a hard word on him for me, only a greater love always no matter how many of the seeds and plants I trampled down. God Himself, Who used to fill me altogether, and Who has filled

me even since you came. Who never parted from me when I was most bitter agin Him. Betsy and many a friend I have . . . the girls I used to go to school with, and pray with in the sodality . . . the whole congregation of Brinney chapel."

"It's the bitter glass has got hold of you sure enough," he said, with a laugh that had a power of bitterness in it.

To near break her heart the sound of it did, but she had to go on :

"You may laugh at me, and put ignorance on me if you like. No learning at all is on me, but I'm telling you the truth of what I see. Like a hen with a lot of chickens round me I am, that I have to keep from all hurt. It's a queer thing to say the likes of that of the great God, and He one of them. But it's what I feel. The love you have put on me I can't use to the hurt of anyone, not even of an enemy, if I had one. . . . It's too holy and tender it is to hurt even a brute beast with it, or a stock or a stone."

"Yourself ?"

"Myself don't matter, God help me."

"Me then ?"

That was a blow that struck home surely, making the rock that was already trembling under her, shake and split. A desperate call she made on her love.

"It's well you know there isn't any torture I wouldn't go through to save you from an ounce of pain. But it's many an ounce of pain I'd put on you in order to save you from tons of it. Meshed in the nets of God and the world we are, God help us."

Every look that she loved in him, passed over

his face . . . stood out together on it, as it were. . . . great love of her . . . a laugh at her, the same as if he said, what a nonsensical little fool you are . . . great respect for her . . . contempt of what she said . . . some fear and doubt on him, all the same, because of it . . . the pride and the determination of Lucifer on him not to be influenced in the least bit either by her, or by his own fears or doubts.

Never was so much love on her for him. Great waves of her went out to him. To fold herself round and round him she wanted. To gather him between her breasts and shield him from every bitter wind of the world. A great pride on her for the look of defiance of God and man that was on him. Still, with all that, glad she was that her feeling of a mother triumphed over the other desires she had. . . . Racked she was, at the same time, and he all that a woman could ever hope or look for in a man.

To grip the legs of the chair she had to, to keep herself from rushing to him, and he drawing her with all the force of a magnet. . . . The silliest things she wanted to do, and they promising her all the happiness of the world : to rub her chin on his hair ; to run her open palm down along his sleeve, to cuddle his head on her neck and get drunk on the feel of it and the smell of his hair. . . . In a golden mist she saw him, a shiver of beauty coursing through her. . . .

Surprised she was to see him standing by the fire again, and she thinking that her eyes had been glued on him all the while at the head of the table. This time, quick above the turmoil of desire in her, her soul of love rose up to protect him, the sadness

there was on him. But no weakening of his spirit. Just as if he saw the whole world of God and men pictured before him on a map. All the weaknesses and difficulties clear to him. The determination on him to tread them all down, a mixture of pride and pity on him.

Or, it might be the suffering will of God Himself that was on him. Pity fading his pride to sadness, and he taking on him the cross that was to draw down on him the jeers and howls of the world. . . .

Or was it love of her only, and a sadness for the rocks she was putting in his path? She didn't know. Only a despairing feeling was on her. . . . The very weakness that was sinking her into nothing goading her to some strength. . . .

The Blessed Mother followed the Cross step by step, knelt by the foot of it, and tasted the bitterness of His dripping blood in her kisses, crying her Son more than her God; her thought likely on the care and decent burial of His body. . . . And 'twasn't a sacred body only she herself had to guard, but a trusted leader of men, the very soul and breath of a great cause, in a wide stretch of country anyway. If she hurt him itself she'd have all that to her credit and her comfort.

It's the confident smile of a child was on him again, a great hope in his eyes that brought the blackness of despair on her. Seeing many things he might be, but he couldn't see into her tangled mind and heart. If the skies fell itself, it's firm she'd have to stand on her own vision. . . .

If he only kept that distance from her she'd be safe enough, though her heart 'd split itself.

He near brought a smile on her the way he held out his hand, as he used to do with the committee,

the certainty on him that he could make them understand the ins and outs of a thing, and it mostly far beyond them :

“ A nice net you have coiled around us ! Dozens of knots in it. Most of them you can untie easily enough yourself. I’ll be a help to you with a few more. But, as things are, we’ll have to cut a few of them. I understand how you feel, for I feel something the same.”

But, there and then, it’s to drop all talk of knots and nets he did, and launch out on love itself. Like a prophet of God he looked the fire there was on him. Spellbound she was, and robbed of her senses entirely, the way he wrote in shining words all the dreams of her life on the air in front of her. As clear as the world after rain, picture after picture grew before her. To know they were true you would, and you not making any attempt at all to follow the drift of his words, not understanding the half of them if the truth was told. . . .

How God and the world and man were made by love. . . . Rock and air and water, the lightning flash and the stone that shone on a queen’s bosom. . . . How, in the vision of the love that was in the earth and air, men began to make a dream that was to transform the world. . . . Dim it was at first, but ever growing clearer and clearer. Slower than a snail crossing the road, it grew along the path of time. Taking a wrong turning here, going astray in a wood, being sunk in a bog hole and near lost entirely.

At first, love was hardly more than the struggle to keep life alive upon the earth. Then the dream began to take more shape among a few. Laws and religions grew out of it, served its will, and

went down into the waste of time. More and more, men saw that it wasn't life only that was necessary for the growth of the world, but the highest flight of the spirit and mind of man. Seeing this and going back on it, men and women were to this day. A fistful of sovereigns or a couple of cows or a farm or a slated house or a throne, ambition for yourself to be great or for your country to be great, blinding them to the vision of love from which the only real greatness in them came . . . by which only they could grow into the fulness of the image of God. . . .

Still, year by year, the vision grew. . . . One poet or another pierced the veil of things and made the truth of God clearer to the eye. It was how in every human heart some tree of love was growing. In many it was little more than a seed. In others only a small shoot. . . . In every stage of growth it was, like the trees you'd see in a big uncared wood: some growing fair and noble in the light; some stunted by the wind, some by lightning, some by cancerous growths, some with ivy drawing the life out of them, some smothered in weeds and briars. . . .

"It takes two people, Ann, a man and a woman, to make of their love the perfect tree: the holy tree whose roots, springing from two human hearts, pierce the sky; whose branches enmesh all the light and beauty of heaven and earth."

He stopped, his eyes fixed on the lowering clouds, as if he saw his vision painted across them. . . . A holy tree he looked himself, the light of faith there was on him, the glow of love he sent through the room. . . . And, with it all, a great loneliness on him that stabbed her heart.

“ Out of desire the world was born, and man and the spirit of man and its desires.”

More at her ease she felt and he arguing like. As plain as the day it was all to him no doubt. Only it's the queer liking for hard words the best of men had, and they having learning on them. It's the megrim St. John himself put on you in them figaries at the end of the New Testament. . . .

The more Brian plunged into high talk the more lost she was. . . . The whole world knowing that God made everything out of His love in six days. Still she liked to hear him talk, and took great delight in the play of his face . . . little smiles that near sucked the heart out of her, crossing his cheeks like gleams of sun chasing the shadows out of a hard March day. . . .

“ Two stunted souls wandering about the world we'll be, unsatisfied desire searing our souls as well as our flesh.”

She could understand that, and it put the cold of despair on her . . . but the grace of God 'd help them. She'd pray for him till the tongue went dry on her. . . .

“ Don't say the like of that, Brian agra. It's the great man you are going to be, and I can't be the one to pull you down. I'll pray and pray to God to ease our hearts.”

For the first time she saw a real bitter look on him. Only for the love that was behind it, it's to shrivel her up it would. And bitter enough he said :

“ Kill God, and then pray to Him. Kill the soul in both of us to give me a tuppenny ha'penny place in the world! Make up your mind, Ann, it's life or death now. Life is the adventure of the

soul . . . the only one. Place and power resting on false values are nothing . . . well enough in their own small way, but good only for the grain of truth in them. If they come in the way of the soul they are only weeds for the burning."

The soul was rocking within her with fear, his words clouding and blinding her. Head or tail she couldn't rightly make of them . . . only that he was bent on ruining himself for her.

"Brian! Brian! I could never do it. I will never do it . . . never . . . never. The movement? Your country?"

"It's the dead husk you've left to fight for it."

With that she could only cry the heart out of her.

He hung round her, like a child, patting her and comforting her, bewailing his own selfishness for putting sorrow on her. . . . How he had made too light of all the difficulties that were on her. A selfish brute he made himself out to be. She could see that he felt it all too, in a way, though there was a hollow sound in his voice. Like one'd feel for a child that was crying for nothing, he did. Rattling a spoon agin the side of the cot he was, to ease her. Picking up words of comfort for her from the trouble on her face, and not out of the depths of his mind. . . .

But any straw she could jump at. . . . He'd be safe anyway. . . . Little pride was on her, and a great darkness. . . . A feeling on her that she had dealt him a blow; together with a desire to cloak it over and not let herself see it. . . . Great love of him bulging her heart, with a feel as if it was crushed down under a weight. . . . Gratitude

to him welling up all over her and making her lips and her fingers tremble. . . .

The heart stopped in her at the tolling of a bell. For the first few strokes she had the thought that it was her own dead bell. . . . A queer feeling of numbness on her.

“The call for the lifeboat crew! I must go.”

God forgive her 'twasn't to think of the danger of any poor soul in a ship she did at first; but that he was able to bring back his mind at all to the business of the world of men. Despair was on him, and bitterness. The twitching of agony had gone from his lips. There was the hard coldness of a block of ice on him. The groping look had passed off him. He wasn't Brian any more. Like as if the heart had died in him he was, the determined will of him only being left. That was the tone of voice that was on him.

“Ann, Ann,” he wrenched out of him.

And in one flash she saw all the misery of his soul.

To kiss her and kiss her he did as if he'd ate her. For a minute she was lost to the world. . . . Then her mind came back to her, and her duty . . . the priest and the rest . . . himself most of all. . . . Half wishing that he'd kiss her dead to them she was; but the glass of her duty kept flashing in front of her, and it's to free herself from his arms she did, more by the thought of her mind than by any strength that was in her.

“A last weakness . . . the end . . . well.”

To sink into the chair she had to. But she couldn't lift her eyes off his face. A smile that you'd sell your soul for was on him, though his lips were shaking with pain. Her heart was crying

out to him to take her with him . . . anywhere . . . to the ends of the earth. But all the loving hands of earth and Heaven choked it back. Like a woman without life, she felt his kiss on her hair.

“Goodbye, Ann. You’d better not come here again. God bless you.”

She heard the door open, and the sound of his feet in the stone passage, Thady’s voice pressing him to eat the food that was ready, some murmur from him, the clanging of the back door, the dying away of his last footstep. . . .

An emptiness was on her that was all the desolation of the world . . . dead she was, without thought or feeling on her . . . for ages and ages. . . .

Then, out of the nothingness in her an image of him grew up in her . . . scattered and bothered at first . . . bit by bit she built on to him his smile, the colour of his eyes and of his hair . . . getting clearer and clearer he was, till at the long last, she had him in her near as solid as he was in the the flesh. . . .

Walking down with him to the lifeboat house she was. . . . Spilt in two she was . . . a great ache on her and a great joy . . . the joy of love and the ache of emptiness. . . . Like that he would live in her for ever. She’d have happiness in the memory of him, and of all he had ever been to her. . . . Some day God might fill the emptiness of her.

EIGHTH CHAPTER

“Go home now, alanna. It’s too racking them sights is for a woman.”

To lean in comfort she could on the sound of his voice alone. Tender as the Virgin Mother Herself Maurice was, and she sick nearly to the death in soul and body. He was her only stand-by, and God Himself deserting her. The hardness of God was all she could see in the world, and He looking down on the suffering of it without turning a hair. Didn’t He once tell His own mother to go about her business and leave Him to attend to His affairs? A frown on Him maybe, like He had for herself this night. Worse, for it’s deaf entirely He was to her, His face set in stony silence, just as if she didn’t exist for Him at all.

“Will ye be able to save the poor souls?”

“Who knows?”

She could hardly hear him above the shrieking of the storm. Four times already they had fired the rocket, and every time the rope fell wide of the ship. An easy mark you’d think she was, and the lightning showing her clear for the flash of an eye. But the pitch dark covered her again before they had time to take proper aim.

A wreck she looked already, without a sail or a mast to her, mountains of waves dashing her higher up on the reef. To get the line home they must on the lee side of the deck-house, where the

poor souls were lashed to the railing, one woman and a score or more of men.

It's like the stony heart of God she herself had for them poor wrecked souls, the envy she had on them of their nearness to death. The image of herself she could see in their white draggled faces when the lightning lit them up. Only it was some hope of succour was on them, and she had none at all.

"It's a matter of minutes now before she's stove in. A timber ship out of Halifax she is."

The cool matter-of-factness of Maurice in the face of the wreck, and he more than once in one, struck her cold. And the businesslike way the rest of the men went about their work, just as if life and death were of as little consequence to them as the bitter hurricane that swept the cliff. But it's a glad shout they gave all the same when Teigue Sweeny cried out :

"I'm damned if they haven't got it."

A matter of years it seemed before the rope was paid out and the basket fixed. The woman was the first ashore, and Mary Lahiff hurried off home with her. The Lahiffs being the nearest house ; and their kitchen already laid down in dry straw, and blankets gathered from the whole townland.

Five men after, she kept count of, and her mind all the time out on the trackless sea. Out there somewhere the lifeboat was, and it searching for this or the other ship. More heed she gave to the flare that showed now and again where the lifeboat was, and she hardly able to make out whether it was a signal or a flash of lightning, than to the safety of the souls being hoisted on

to the cliff, or to the danger on them that were still on the wreck.

Out there in the murk her duty was and her love, and it wasn't Joe she was thinking of at all, but of Brian that she had banished from her heart. A sort of figure of fun her duty was, with all the good she was to it. . . .

Firm enough she had been set on doing her duty, and she struck desolate at the Kerrigans. A grand image of Brian she had set up in front of her for worship during all her days. Like to her God she was to kneel to Brian, and he set high above her by her duty. All her life he was to be a comfort to her in her memory of his goodness and the smile on his mouth. Like an altar of the Blessed Virgin she set him up in her heart, to bring her troubles to him and get comfort from him day by day. Like one of them saints seeing visions she was, and she decking him in holiness, and a blue cloak with stars on it, and a crown on his head. More candles than she could count, in front of him, and a red lamp of colza oil that'd burn night and day, and flowers the finest that ever grew. . . .

Vexed with Thady Burke she had been for disturbing that image, and he bothering her to eat the best of boiled eggs and potatoes and butter. But sure it's to scatter her vision to the four winds of heaven Thady did, with his talk of food and the like. When she had palavered him out of the room, sorra one of her could see Brian any more as a holy statue, but as a man with the hunger of love on him. . . . Eyes on him that drew her ten times closer to him than when he was in the room with her.

To fly the house she did, taking no heed at all of Thady's shouts after her. Some rag of duty, no doubt, urging her to fly the man that was filling every vein in her body. Without much heart in her for the task, if the truth was told, she called on God to help her. But God was powerless. She might just as well try and fly from herself. It'd be easier to drain out the sea with a sieve than empty Brian out of her heart with duty or God or man.

Full of him she was, and still her heart and her arms were aching with emptiness. The winds were moaning with her sorrow and the breakers shrieking her despair. She called loud to them in her agony, but it's to change their note into a mock of her they did.

When she saw him again, up among the lowering clouds, it's the cold face of despair he had on him. A look of reproach on him for her, for the blankness of misery she had put on him. Quicker than the hurricane he flew from her, the whole heavens rattling with thunder till he faded over the edge of the world. . . . There was Maurice talking again!

"That's eleven, thank God. I think we'll do it yet. Nine more there are, they say."

What were eleven or twenty to her if she lost Brian? Hardly a feel at all she had, in the selfishness of love that was on her, for the poor souls and they drenched to the skin.

It's to bring back her own sorrow Maurice's voice did. 'Twasn't the wreck she was seeing any more, and it in front of her eyes, but the scene hours ago at the boathouse. Out before her eyes like a picture it stood. More dead than alive she was when she got there after leaving Kerrigan's.

But the first sight she caught of Brian warmed her more than a bonfire. The feeling she had of heating herself at the fire of love itself, a glow on her that coloured the sky. But it's quick the heart shivered in her at the view of the set faces of Brian and Joe. It was no dream at all she had of Brian's looks. A worse despair was on him than she saw, and he riding the storm. Determined as the God of judgment he was. Joe, facing him, dangling the keys, his back to the locked door, had on him the obstinacy of all the Dunnes.

In their oil-clothes and sou' westers they were much of a likeness in build. Suffering was on the both of them. Joe it turned in on himself. Brian, in some way, it made one with the whole world of suffering souls. Two stark wills they were, pitted agin other. Though Joe was her duty and Brian her sin, it's the opposite she read in their eyes. Hate of the man in front of him only was on Joe. Hope for himself had gone from Brian, but a great faith was still on him, as wide and deep as the world. Like as if his life as Brian Hogan had ended; while his faith in the future, for the rest of men, was more firm than ever. If duty ever shone on a man's face, it shone on him.

Round them, in the half of a circle, bent forward agin the storm, was the crew of the lifeboat, with the calmness on them of men that had often stood in the face of death and had no fear of it now. Resignation on them or indifference or hope, as a part of the day's work. Interest in the depths of their eyes all the same. Their only movement to turn round a quid in their mouths, or spit out the juice. Maurice, with a sort of amused contempt

on him besides. And the sergeant of police, fidgety for fear the two men 'd come to blows.

"I'm the coxwain, and I won't let the boat go out."

"Coxwain be damned, Joe Dunne," Dave Driscoll said quietly, with hardly a move of a muscle.

"Open the door."

Like God Himself speaking Brian was, no passion at all on him, only authority.

Joe flushed into a brick red. His hands opened and shut as if he was eager for Brian's throat.

"Don't you cross my path once too often, Brian Hogan. But it's of the boat I'm thinking. Twenty yards she wouldn't go, and I'm responsible for her. Let alone for all your lives."

In spite of the mixed grain there was in the man you'd know he was sincere. Brian saw it with them eyes of his that saw into the heart of a thing. No notice at all he took of Joe's burning ill-will.

But a rage of anger came on Maurice all of a sudden, and he whipt a revolver out of his hip pocket and clapped the muzzle of it to Joe's temple.

"Drop the key, you hulk of emptiness. I wouldn't dirty my hands with you; still I'll give you ten seconds to make your soul."

Like one of them picture shows that came to Lismeedy it was. Though she held her breath, there was no fear on her of anything worse happening, only a sort of pity for Joe, and she well knowing him. White to the gills he went; and it's to loose his hold on the keys he did without him knowing it. Dave Driscoll took them from his hand. Still, it wasn't without some dignity he said:

"I call you, Sergeant Moran, to protect me in doing my duty."

The sergeant shuffled on his feet and pulled at his beard. "Hard of hearing I am to-day, Joe Dunne. Have a care, or you'll be run down by the boat."

A sort of lost look was on Joe when he turned round and saw the men fixing on their life belts and saving lines. Brian had already taken his seat in the bow and Maurice was readying the steer. In one glint of hate he took in them both, and then steadied himself.

"Lay that down, Maurice Logan. And do you take the rocket and her crew up the cliffs. A Dunne can go down with his boat as well as another."

Maurice said "Aye, aye," with some respect on him, and gave up his belt without another word. In a minute Joe was standing in the stern, with the sober look on him of many a generation of men that met their death by the sea.

"Ready there, Brian Hogan?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

Like a death rattle question and answer barked down the tafts to Dave Driscoll, who spat out solemn and said: "All is as it should be. No rancour."

You could hardly hear Joe's voice above the wind, shouting "Let go"; nor see the boat as she slid down into the surf. It's of little account she felt in the world somehow, her eyes glued on the boat and it tossing about like a cork, a great blankness on her in the face of life and death. For a minute the souls left behind held their quids still, and the faces on them betrayed a prayer in many a one's heart. She could hear a sigh of relief above the storm when Maurice said:

“If they can weather Tully rock, they might win safe.”

He called out the numbers of the rocket crew while every man's eyes were still fixed on the boat, or on where it ought to be. Near out of sight it was one minute in the trough of a wave ; and the next almost high and dry in the air, the oars beating nothing but the wind. When the boat was lost to sight entirely round the corner of the rock, Maurice gave the order to fall in, with more cheerfulness than she saw on him for many a long day. And it was how the other men joked and they working, as if a great weight was lifted off them.

Half-way up the cliff, and she feeling cut off from her love and from the whole race of men, Maurice noticed her. All he said was, “You here, Ann,” but there was feeling in it that brought her in touch with the world again, so that she no longer felt herself to be a lone soul on a rock, just looking on.

“Will they save the ship ?”

“They might then. Anyways they can do no more than try.”

But it was thinking of Brian she was more than of any ship. The look he had on him was that he had got a mortal hurt. And 'twas she dealt the blow.

Thousands of questions rose up in her. Could he do any work at all in the world, and the soul dead in him ? What was the meaning of life at all ? What was right, and what was wrong ?

In close touch with the meaning of the world Brian seemed, and he laying down the law at the boathouse. The life of his body was little matter in his eyes. It was always the soul with him . . .

the spirit and the heart. What he often called the dream and the vision . . . the only real things that were. In them she struck him.

Like the whistling wind all the laws and rules of the world seemed then, and she trying to track the boat in the gathering mist. When it was lost to view itself, she could still see him at the bow oar, a shining star. Across the waste of surf and mounting waters she wanted the voice of her heart to reach him. The thunder, and it shaking the sky, 'd carry her thoughts to him. He was the love of her soul. He was her soul. He was her vision of God and of the wonders of the earth. God and heaven and the world of men and all beauty, were only the shadows of his love. He was the light of the world and the light in her heart. In a world of darkness he was the only light. If he was quenched. . . .

Like a dead soul she was, weeping salt tears, and tasting the bitterness of them on her lips for comfort, the pity of God in them. Like you'd sometimes feel on you, to your ease, and you waking out of a bad dream. . . . But she mustn't be thinking of herself; and them poor draggled men half famished with the wet and cold. Was that seventeen or eighteen?

"Only two more now."

That was good news. If they'd save them all, Brian might come back safe. It was how the whole world was bound up with him now. One minute he was hope to her, and despair the next.

She couldn't keep her mind off him. It was the same when they caught the first sight of the wreck. The excitement of the men, and a big ship looming out of the mist and heading straight for the reef,

only brought back her wrong-doing to her. To save a ship 'd be nothing if she couldn't save him. To save the whole world 'd be nothing. . . . Little meaning the voices of the men had ; still what they said remained painted some way on her mind. Two ships there must be, for the one the lifeboat was after was schooner rigged and the one on the reef was a brigantine.

"Only one man left now, and he behaving like a madman. The captain, and he dead drunk, they say. Accusing himself of losing the ship he is."

That woke her out of herself. Like her the poor captain was, in the agony of his soul. . . .

Quicker and quicker the lightning flashed. Like the broken ghost of the world the wreck looked, and it gleaming for a second in the light. As slow as death the basket was creeping towards it. The fate of the world was on all the faces on the cliff. Even Maurice's eyes had interest in them. Rigid as statues all the men were, ghastly in the lightning, eager fire in their unblinking eyes only.

One long sigh of relief rose from all when Mick Canavan gave the word to haul. . . . Anyway, the captain was in the basket at last.

"Good God !"

The one shout they made, all their lips speaking at once. Only a glimpse they had of a madman standing up in the basket and hacking at the drawing rope with a sheath knife.

"Haul for your lives," Maurice shouted.

Hardly ten feet from the edge of the cliff the captain was in the next flash. A burst of horrid laughter rent the air above the shriek of the storm,

and the men fell over other at the windlass. Hauling on nothing they were. . . .

How long after, Maurice took her by the arm and drew her away, she didn't know. The shriek of a lost soul was still in her ears. . . . On the rocks below the poor captain was . . . or more likely washed off by the waves. . . . No one could go down there till the morning.

Then from death to life she was raised in a minute. . . . The mist lifted, and they were able to read the signals from the lifeboat. . . . Twenty-seven men were saved from the other ship, the *Becky Jones* out of Cardiff she was, before she was broke on the bar. . . . Into Ballytogher the lifeboat 'd put to repair an air chamber, and to find a doctor for one of the mates who had a leg fractured on him. . . .

Like a child and she going to the races she was, babbling to Maurice on her way back to the house. There was joy in the wind sweeping through her. The glad thumping of her heart was making the music of the thunder and painting the sky with glory. Aching in all her bones and at the back of her eyeballs she was, from tiredness and want of sleep, but it was only a spur to the lightness of her limbs. She could read her happiness in the letters of white fire the angels were flashing on the roof of the world.

Straight into her heart she was looking now. . . . The holy tree was at the height of its blossom. He was safe. He'd come back to her. They were never separated at all. There had never been a word of difference between them. The bitter glass was only a bad dream. All them ravens of doubt were blackbirds singing love on every bough. . . .

A thought of the man dead on the rocks threw a shadow on her for a second, and the light wavered in her.

“ Why did he do it at all, Uncle Maurice ? ”

“ The captain ? Who knows ? ”

“ A misfortune in love he had, maybe ? ”

“ At the bottom, likely.”

The whole sky was full of Brian's words. The moon and the stars had driven off the black clouds of fear. Singing at her they were the full meaning of love, and putting a laugh in her heart with their nods and smiles. Love was the light of God in the world. Quench it and the sun itself 'd be only a pale image of darkness.

“ There's great love on me for Brian Hogan, Uncle Maurice.”

“ The luck of God on you.”

A holy rain of comfort he poured down on her in a saint's voice. . . . Most of the wrong of the world came from thwarted love. Most of the right in the world of men was sparks falling from the happiness of them that found God in others' souls. . . . Like two dead suns a man and a woman were, wandering about aimless till they found other. At the first touch of others' souls a new star was born that lighted whole worlds.

“ 'Tis only half alive I was surely till I found it.”

“ Half alive ? There's no life at all but it. Whatever life there was in you was only the dream of it. Shatter that and it's a dead corpse trailing the world you'll be. Seize hold of it and God is born again. It's not the same soul at all you'll have in you, nor the same heart, nor the same mind. New hearing you'll have for the pain of the world, and great power for its joy.”

Like as if he was reading it in the sky Maurice looked, and it written there by the hand of God Himself, the moon shining a blessing of peace on his haggard face.

“The storm has near spent itself,” he said, after a long silence, as they were all but swept off their feet at the bawn gate.

That was how she felt herself, the stillness of a spent storm on her soul. Full of content and ease her heart was, and the future as bright and clear as the land under a high moon, the sea all a-glitter with her joy.

“I don’t know when I ate a bite. Peggy is sure to have left something ready if she’s gone to bed itself. Come in for a minute.”

Sure enough there was cold bacon and a cake and butter and a jug of milk on the kitchen table, and the fire was still hearty. Little songs of delight the gleams on the jugs and candlesticks were singing to her. To pile on more dry turf she did, till the flames put a red flush on everything. Maurice lit his pipe; and she took the lamp up the ladder to take a look at the child. Like the Blessed Mother and the Infant Saviour Peggy and Bessie were, a smile and quiet sleep on the both of them; Peggy lying on her side, her arm curved round the child’s head as if shielding her from all harm. . . . The peace of the heart was on the whole house.

It was on Maurice’s face too when she got back to the kitchen, and he having the table drew over in front of the fire. Like the food of them gods the bacon was, and the milk, nectar. When the hunger was dead in them it’s to light his pipe again Maurice did, with a sigh of content. Great pleasure she had in knocking a live sod with the

poker, sending showers of gold sparks up the chimney. It's to rain joy on the whole world her love could, and never come to an end. To tell Maurice about the holy tree she did; and he said it was the truth of God. And about the bitter glass; but that seemed far away now, and foolish.

Great comfort there was from him over that same bitter glass. It's almost to think Brian was speaking you would, there was that wisdom on him. This darkness and that was blinding the minds of men, and one weed and another growing in their hearts. The crowner's jury 'd likely say the poor captain was lost by drink, and his ship too. It was always the shallow view men took through habit and custom; the easy lie being less trouble than the truth. Love made you sink yourself and let you pierce the darkness of all things. It shrivelled up all the weeds in you, and put courage in you to follow the truth.

Many a book he had read, on a long voyage, of history and philosophy and the like; but it's more than half an eye the most of them had for the false glass that was deceiving the world. Even a poet 'd let a comfortable house come between him and the light in his heart. Here and there an odd man let himself be stoned or burnt, and had lit up the world ever since with courage and hope. All the failure of the world was the failure to follow the truth of love. The unselfishness of love only, and not statecraft and guile and cuteness in business 'd make a happy world.

¶ Long into the night he talked, putting courage and a great faith on her. It's from the love of man and woman the world 'd have to take a new start. Not passion only they had to share, but

the same truth of the mind and soul. Like blind puppies men and women were till the call of other made them one in soul and body. Like blind puppies most people in the world were still, and would be till their deaths, because they married for a house or land, or this position or that, or passion only. But if real love was on them it's not the same people at all they were after. . . . Happy they'd be themselves ; and their happiness 'd give an upward lift to the world.

She hardly noticed when he left, her whole soul was that flooded with the truth and glory of love. It's to stand on the pinnacle of the world, hand in hand with Brian, she did. The woods had a new colour, and the sea. Truth and beauty and love were one. The touch of his hand made her one with him in mind and soul, one with God and all the hopes of men. . . .

NINTH CHAPTER

To fall asleep on the hob she must have, for it took her some seconds to recognise Tim Lahiff's voice. It's to blink and blink she did, the light of the sun blinding her; a great comfort and happiness, that hated to be disturbed, still floating about in her. Who on earth tucked her round in the shawl? It must be Peggy, and she going out to milk the cows.

"It's how Joe asked me to call and tell you. The lifeboat is done up beyond in Ballytogher, and he stayed behind to see to it. And Brain Hogan to look after the wounded man. By the luck of the world Patsy Davoren's smack and my own yawl had put in there from the storm. The crew of the lifeboat and all of us came back in the smack, and left the yawl behind for Joe and Brian when they are ready to cross. Some time during the day likely, and the sea gone down and all, with only an odd gust of wind left."

Straight back to the life of men he brought her from out of the mind of God, and there wasn't much comfort in it. Anyway the sea was laughing courage at her, and she was able to stifle the sinking feeling that made an effort to overcome her.

Able to discourse about this and that she was, a great talking mood being on Tim. The light of God 'd shine on the whole parish surely for the work the lifeboat crew did in the night. Twice they were overturned without the loss of a man, Brian and Joe covering themselves with glory;

saving the whole ship's crew after, with only one broken leg to the bad. And the rocket crew doing equally well, though in no danger to speak of. The mangled corpse of the poor captain was found at the low tide, and was lying now as decent as could be expected, under a tarpaulin in Tim's barn. Across there Peggy was, the child with her. Waiting the crowner's quest most of the neighbours were there, and discussing this and that.

All sorts of disjointed thoughts she had on her when Tim went. The great ease that must be on Peggy's heart, and she able to go across at all to the Lahiffs. Joe and Brian beyond in Ballytogher, and they to be coming over in the boat together. Did Peggy give Bessie her breakfast? But she'd be sure to do that. It's little she had left undone in the house, the pigs fed and all, and the cows driven out.

Great happiness was on her and a great uneasiness. Like as if her mind was making the attempt to frighten her heart but was able to make little headway, beyond sending an odd drift of wrack across it. . . .

To pound up some brickbat she did and brighten the candlesticks, though it's little they wanted brightening.

Before she knew where she was it's on her way to the cliff above the lifeboat house she found herself, her shawl over her head, some great enterprise in her heart. Still, when she got there, 'twas only to stare and stare over in the direction of Ballytogher she did.

"That's Joe, right enough. It's Tim Lahiff's yawl, anyway. The second one, with the brown patch on the mainsheet."

Anywhere else she wished Mick Delaney and his old spyglass to be. It's how all the world was reminding her of Joe. But it was the thought of Brian that brought the blush to her face, Joe being only a sprinkle of cold water, not enough to quench the joy in her.

"It's the two of them must be in it, and they flying a jib on the gaff!"

"I'm surprised at Joe being that reckless as to boom a jib on a day of the kind, and the weather not settled. It's Brian Hogan likely, in his hurry to get back, and there little wind low down. On such another day George Hegarty was lost in a sudden squall."

An old croaker Mick Delaney was well-known to be. As if anyone could be lost, with the sun on everything. Though there were mares' tails in the sky itself, and an odd drift of wrack, it's smooth and oily the sea looked. A bit sullen maybe, and the colour of the storm still on it, but making great strides at the recovery of its good temper. Pleasant enough the wreck looked, little breakers playing round her, the sun glistening on her wet planking. Not a trace at all was there of the *Becky Jones* on the bar. Poor forlorn women nearly all them wrecks were. The *Brunswick Lass* and the *Becky Jones*, all in the one night! And last year 'twas the *Barmouth Queen*. It was all one, whether you were a queen or a plain girl when a storm struck you. . . .

But she wouldn't let them thoughts come on her. Nor them doubts as to what she'd do when Joe and Brian landed. He was coming back safe to her. That was enough to send the blood racing through her. Enough to make the thoughts in her burst

out into little laughs. Bruagh peak was shining in the sun, and the woods were a golden carpet at its feet. Like a gull the yawl was, skimming over the water. It's another Spring was in the year, the glad fresh look there was on everything, a silver haze over Ballytogher, a note of joy in the roaring of the bar itself. The Spring was in herself too, all the angels of God at play within her, frisking round in her like young lambs.

The two men she could make out in the boat now. Her heart told her 'twas Brian was booming the jib, spreading it wide to catch every breath of air. Nearer to her he was, and he amidships, almost blotting out Joe in the stern, except for a fear he cast on the back of her mind.

“I wish to God they hauled in that boom.”

Like an uneasy dog Mick Delaney was limping up and down, disturbing the glory of the day. The other boat had turned back to Ballytogher, and it's alone on the sea the *Duncorrig Beauty* was now. Well she deserved the name Tim Lahiff gave her after his wife. Quivering over the water with all the joy and hope of love on her she was. Laughing with love the whole world was. The rock under her hand was warm with it. You could fill yourself with it in the fresh smell of the earth. The air itself was coloured with it.

Brian flying to her the boat was. She had to shut her eyes agin the ache of delight of it. All the trees of the world bursting into blossom in the same second of time she was. Drowned in an ocean of joy she was. . . .

“Damnation! My God! My God!”

To laugh she did at the wail of woe in Mick's voice. But the clatter of his feet made her open

her eyes. Skelping down the face of the cliff towards the boathouse he was, shouting now to waken the dead. The cold darkness in the air froze the laugh on her lips. With some great weight on her heart, she looked out to sea. An angry ruffled scowl was on the face of the water, and no boat at all.

To burst out into a laugh that frightened her she did, at her foolishness. Some weakness, or a sudden blindness, had come on her. She leant agin the rock and rubbed her eyes, great fear and great hope on her. The alarm bell, going like mad, struck terror into her. The cold of death was on her, a trembling all over her, weights on her eyelids. No thought at all was on her, but a numbness of despair. . . .

The warmth in the air again brought her back to herself, and she was able to move her lids. The sun was on everything, the sea glittering with joy. Some madness of hope it gave her, and she searched and searched for the boat. The heart near stopped in her. She strained and strained her eyes, afraid to breathe. Was it a big cork or a man bobbing up and down? The little waveens left by the squall laughing over it, half covering it always, hiding it altogether for a space.

To sink to her knees in the weakness of her hope she did. Swimming round and round in the one place he was, looking for something. That'd be Brian, surely, searching for the man that was in the boat with him. Joe was the second man. 'Twas a pity that any poor soul 'd be lost. But Brian was safe. He was safe. He was safe. Shouting it out to the day in a voice without a sound in it she was, fear gripping her. What was

he wasting time for, diving and all, as if there was any hope of the other man? Brian it must be, surely, with such thought for another on him. . . .

The neighbours were all at Lahiff's and 'd be sure to hear the bell. But why didn't Mick Delaney put out a yawl himself, and there many a boat on the slip? Thank God, there was one shoving out. . . .

Where was Brian at all? The damned sun was blinding her. Thank God! there he was, the blessed sun lighting him up. Heading straight for the shore he was, not too much strength in him, lagging now and again. . . . Striving to float he was now, and the clothes weighing him down. . . . God couldn't be so cruel. In spite of God or the devil she'd save him. . . . Floating on the sea of her love he was, the soft breeze of it cooling his face. All the strength of her limbs she was wishing out of her to him. . . .

Starting he was again, but slower now, stopping often, the waves washing over him. If there was a God in the world he'd be saved. . . . If there was any power in her. . . . Her whole soul had gone across the water to him. . . . Blowing her breath into his lungs she was, and her blood into his veins. . . .

She couldn't pray to God. . . . Her love 'd save him. . . . Silver fire the sea was now, with no cork bobbing on it. . . . It was only the light in her eyes. . . . No eyes at all she had, and no feeling. Wasn't she all out there on the water. . . .

There was a band playing! Rising the roof of heaven with glad shouts the boat's crew were, and they lifting him over the gunwale. They were waving their oars to her, shouting joy. . . . To

sink on her heels she did, the weakness and happiness of all the love of the world on her. To feel him in her arms she did, and she drunk with the smell of his hair, all the music and peace of the world in her blood. . . .

“Ann, Ann, Ann.”

Waking her out of heaven Mick Delaney was. Dazed with joy she was, and she hardly able to rise to her feet.

It's the good will and gladness of the world was on Mick's shrivelled face.

“He's safe at last. Almost at the last gasp he was. But it's as right as a trivet he's now.”

Laughing she was like a child, glad of the pain he put on her hand and he working it like an old pump, tears running down her face.

“Searching for Brian that near lost Joe. Sorry we all are for poor Brian, but glad to bring your husband back to you.”

Cold as stone she was, and dead, blackness on the sky. The light of God had faded out, the earth sinking under her. . . .

TENTH CHAPTER

SHE couldn't rid herself of them words of Father John that he always began a Good Friday sermon with . . . about the heavens being darkened and the earth trembling. But chiefly she remembered that the dead arose and appeared to many. . . .

She was too dead in herself to remember what had happened to her, though she had some kind of a memory that it was like the crucifixion.

But there was no trembling of the earth now. Still as a pond without a breath on it, it was. And no darkness but the greyness of death. Like a sullen sea under one of them grey January skies the world was. Like grey gulls hopping about the strand and the bare branches of a wood without a leaf in it, the people were. All sounds came from far off, like as if they had no air to move in under a cramped lowering sky. It was how the dead, having risen from their graves, hadn't gone back again. . . .

One of them dead she was herself, with a sort of ghost of a memory on her of something that happened long since. Great things she had been mixed up in seemingly, but there was no spark of feeling in her for them now.

She heard this remark and that, but it's little interest they had for her. Joe saying he warned

him again and again not to tie the sheet to his wrist and slip the end of the rope round the taft. Down like a stone the boat went by the head when the squall struck her, and he tangled in the rigging. Twenty fathom deep he was. . . .

There was no need for Joe to say anything. . . . There was hate on him for Brian, he said. But still he did his best to save him. Reckless the poor soul was through the whole night, doing feats that ballads 'd be written about. Careless of his own life like one of them heroes.

Joe's words meant nothing. She saw the whole story written across the grey sky. Like a ghost of the dead reading her deeds in cold print, she was. There was no love or hate on her or on anybody now. Things had happened just that way long ago. She broke the dream in him. And when he went down into the sea he broke it in her. . . . Herself and the world 'd be less empty if his ghost walked the earth like the rest of men. But it didn't. Twenty fathom deep he was. There was no bitterness on her even for the sea. . . . Things just were that way. . . . Everything cold and dead and silent under the grey sky.

More haggard than the rest of them Maurice looked, the eyes of a dumb dog on him for her. Some sort of a thread he made between her and the past. He made it clear to her that it was searching all the time she was for Brian, and not finding him anywhere. Something going on in her ghost of a mind, and the heart dead in her. Some ghost of a longing on her; and always a deader feeling in her failure to find him. Some memory that she could lay hold of she wanted, instead of the shadow

that wavered and broke when she tried to give it some shape.

“Come up to the house now, alanna.”

“Is that the Kerrigans’ side-car beyond?”

“It is then.”

“Could we drive to Bruagh and back before the night if you borrowed the loan of it off him?”

In less than a minute he had her on it, tucked round in the shawl and an old horse rug, and himself on the other side.

“It’s how the thought came on me that I might see him there if anywhere, or in the woods, or at Lekan ford.”

“I know.”

It was how a deeper understanding was on him than ever, a sort of ghost of hope in his eyes for her, though it’s all the sorrow of the world was in his worn face.

She shut her eyes, but there was only a dark blackness. She tried to surprise some sight of Brian by opening her eyes of a sudden. There was the sun in it sure enough, but it wasn’t him. . . . No light nor glory in it, only a cold dreary whiteness.

At Lekan ford Maurice stopped the horse, but after one look she whispered to him to drive on. An angry spate of yellow water hid the stones, weeds and dragged brambles clogging them. Over Reeky bridge they drove; with no sound of a bird in the long stretch to there, or back to the Raheen woods. Some sort of hope rose in her when they passed the turn to the village, and came to that part of the wood where he kissed her and she saw all the glory of God. To walk it she did,

with Maurice's arm for a crutch. Sodden black leaves it was underfoot, dank and earthly to the smell. Like the slimy pillars of Tully cave the beech stems were, and a leaden sky weighed down on her through the dripping blackened branches.

If there was any hope to kill in her, that'd kill it. But it was hardly a disappointment even was on her. Just as there was no hope on her in going farther. Still she went. Pieces of a song sounded in her ears as they climbed the rise, about a holy tree and a bitter glass; but the words had no meaning for her. And when they stood on the round of the hill one look was enough to make her cry "Take me back." Dark and threatening it was, bare trees and broken branches and muddy water.

To Knockbrack they went, but there was nothing. A grey ball the sun was in the sky, and no track of love on the grey sea.

Her last hope was in the chapel, but it's mouldy it smelt the minute she opened the door. Stained with the drip of water from the roof and windows the walls were. As empty as herself, as empty as the sea and the sky and all the dreary land, the house of God was. The roof with the stars in it was like a big discoloured blue-rag, and there were cracks and dirty patches all over the plaster statue of the Virgin. The deadness and the coldness and the damp of the grave was on everything.

As if she was expecting him, Tom stopped her at the gate and said their grandfather was dead. About the same time as Brian Hogan, he said.

Laid out on the kitchen table he was in his brown habit, a saucer of snuff on his breast. No

more a corpse he looked than the rest of the world, the empty look of the dead on him. Though she fell on her knees no prayer came to her. One remark and another she heard about the drowning and the inquest on the captain. But what she was looking for she couldn't find.

Alone she walked across to the house. The sun had gone down, but it was no more dark without the light than with it. Like a pall of death over the world the black sky was, and no star in it. The pools were dirty water that wetted her through her shoes, and the clauber mud that clogged her steps.

It was six by the clock when she crossed the threshold. She put by her shawl and took up her work as if she had never laid it down. Bessie, playing about Peggy's skirt and she stirring the pigs' food on the fire, took no heed of her. Joe was baiting a long line. He looked up at her and opened his mouth to speak, but, as he often did, he closed it again without saying anything. She rinsed the pail and went out and milked the cows. Their minds were on the hay they were munching, and they took no notice of her.

She was near finished readying up in the dairy when Peggy called her in to supper.

With a sort of far away kindness on him, Joe said to her :

"You must be hungry. Ate a hearty meal. It'll do you good."

Without any thought on her she was spreading the butter thick on her bread, when he said, like a voice out of the past, half sheepish, half pettish :

"Go slow on the butter, Ann. It must last the week."

A strange voice in her said :

“ That’s true.”

Careful she scraped the butter off again.

They spoke of the Lismeedy fair and the price of pigs and oats, and she made a remark that brought praise from Joe on her good sense.

She couldn’t keep her hands from the work through the evening, and laudation came on her from both Joe and Peggy. A great likeness there was in their views and hers now about this and that, and they all dead. Joe said it was the proper woman of a house she was at last.

When she could find nothing else for her hands to do she readied her things to go to bed in the room. Now and again she stood over Bessie’s bedden and wondered at the smile on her that reminded her of something. She couldn’t sleep with the thought of it on her. She got out of bed and lit the candle and stood over the child in her shift, still wondering what it could mean. Bessie wasn’t dead like the rest of the world ? Alive she was, with hope on her.

To cry and cry she did, leaning against the old chest of drawers, some sort of empty comfort in her. She fingered her prayer book, and it lying on the top. A bit of dry southernwood fell out, and she put the shrivelled leaf to her nose. The first scent she felt all the day, came from it. Some connection it had in some way with Bessie. Empty and all as she was, and withered and dry without hope for herself anywhere, she saw the holy tree budding out of the child’s heart with the promise of branches on it that’d pierce the roof.

A desire filled her to tend that dream and help her best to make it blossom.

A still queerer thought came to her as she hugged the bit of southernwood to her breast : that, maybe, twined round about her own heart, there was still some withered root of the holy tree she had destroyed. . . . One day, maybe, the child might quicken it into some sort of ghost of life.

THE END

